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ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE

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Kuncheria Pathil

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Ecumenical Convergence

Edited by

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Editorial

Ecumenical Movement is a great reality of the 20th century. With the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church fully entered into the ecumenical movement, which was initiated by the other Churches at the beginning of the 20th century. In spite of an apparent stalemate in the ecumenical movement today, recent Popes have reiterated several times the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism. Ecumenical dialogues were going on since several decades both at the multilateral and bilateral forums on doctrinal and other issues that still keep the different Churches divided. In fact, much progress has been made in the ecumenical movement and radical changes happened in the life of many Churches concerning their doctrinal positions and attitude to the other Churches, and new relationships have been established.

This Number of *Jeevadhara* is meant to review the progress the Churches have made in the ecumenical movement and in the various inter-Church dialogues on the doctrinal issues that traditionally divided the Churches. We would like to select only a few questions, such as, the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, Forms and Patterns of Ministry and the question of their validity, the Papal Ministry, Scripture and Tradition and the question of Biblical Hermeneutics. Our objective is to highlight the theological and doctrinal convergence that has already emerged in the ecumenical movement and thus help the ordinary members of the Churches to join in the process of ecumenical education and formation.

Many of the old issues and historical controversies are no more causes for keeping the Churches separated. Dialogues between the Oriental Orthodox Churches (the so-called Nestorian and Monophysite Churches) and the Catholic Church reached the conclusion that on the central Christological faith, that Jesus Christ is "fully God and fully Man", there remains absolutely no difference.

Historical controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries were in fact highly influenced by the cultural, linguistic, and philosophical differences. The central issue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches was the understanding and functioning of the Papacy of the time. The Orthodox concept of the "Primacy of Honour", and "Primus inter Pares" has a positive contribution to make in the present discussions and rethinking on the Papacy, especially in the context of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Collegiality of Bishops, and the Protestant suggestion of an "Ecumenical Papacy" in view of the "Petrine function" today. In fact, Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, has invited all the Churches for a patient and fraternal dialogue on the question of the Papal ministry and its functioning today for the unity of the Church. The central doctrine of the Reformers was "Justification by Faith", and that was the basis for all other major differences between Protestants and Catholics. But today Catholics and Protestants have succeeded in clarifying this doctrine and have together made a recent consensus statement on the question of Justification. There are indeed other issues between Catholics and Protestants, such as, Scripture and Tradition, interpretation of the Word of God, Doctrine of the Eucharist, Sacraments, especially Ordained ministry of Bishops and Priests, Teaching authority of the Church or Magisterium etc. Of course, the differences among the Churches shall not be glossed over, but to be taken seriously. Commitment to ecumenism and commitment to truth must go together.

Along with the ongoing multilateral and bilateral dialogues among the Churches, what is required is renewal and radical conversion on the part of all the Churches. Divisions among the Churches and their isolated existence for centuries have, in fact, caused fragmentation among all the Churches, though in different proportions. Hence the need of healing and rediscovery of wholeness on the part of all Churches. Healing of our wounds and rediscovery of wholeness or catholicity needs time, our hard work and above all God's blessings. We cannot bring about Church unity in a day or two. It is in our hopelessness and helplessness that God utters his healing and saving Word that alone can unite and save us.

Unity requires today *mutual recognition of the Churches*. Of course, the Churches cannot simply recognize each other irrespective of what they believe and practise. It has to be a responsible act. Every Church

has a right and responsibility to challenge the other Churches and show that they are in continuity with the original faith and vision of the New Testament Christianity. Could we spell out some of the essential signs or marks of the Church of Christ, so that we could identify it in the many Churches of today? The central Christological faith that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man, the acceptance of the Sacred Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament as a sacred and precious heritage of the Church which contain the Word of God, the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist by which the memory of Christ is celebrated and the Christian community is built up, the commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel as the sacred mission of the Church, the continuation of the Apostolic ministry and the "Episcopal function", and the acceptance of a "Petrine ministry" are some of the basic ecclesial elements by which we can identify the Church of Christ. What I am suggesting here is not "reductionism" or "minimalism" which is detrimental to the uniqueness and individuality of the Churches. I have only pointed out some of the essential and visible elements of the Church of Christ which are found in many Churches today.

Mutual recognition of the Churches and intercommunion among them practically mean the recognition of each other's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. From this point of view the recent document of "Faith and Order Commission" of the World Council of Churches on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (The Lima Document, 1982) is of great significance. This document is the product of a long ecumenical process involving the work of more than 50 years and of hundreds of theologians, scholars and Church leaders and with the collaboration of practically all the Churches including the Catholic Church. The document has articulated the doctrinal convergence on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, in the light of the studies, common worship and experience of the whole ecumenical movement during the last 70 years.

The BEM document tried to articulate the common faith of all the Churches in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. It is a common proclamation of our faith of the One Church received from the Apostolic times. On Baptism and Eucharist there emerged practically a full doctrinal convergence, but in the theology and sacramental practice a healthy pluralism was endorsed. Ministry is indeed the crucial issue. The document made a significant recommendation to all the Churches

to accept the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons as an ecumenical pattern that indeed was normative for all the Churches until the time of the Reformation. The doctrines of apostolic succession, sacramental nature of ordination, nature of Episcopal ministry and Papacy are still to be clarified and settled. But the emerging doctrinal consensus and the proclamation of our common faith in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry has immense ecumenical prospects in view of the mutual recognition of the Churches and the restoration of our communion.

But even if we succeed in solving all the old doctrinal issues among the Churches, other problems may still arise and new divisions may still happen. Emergence of Christian fundamentalism, Racism, Feminist movements including the question of the ordination of women, different approaches to the liberation movements, Christian approaches to other religions, interculturalization of the Gospel etc. are serious new issues which threaten the unity of the Churches, and these issues cut across today our denominational boundaries. Moreover, our search for unity shall not be a narrow Church-centred concern. The Church has to become an effective sign of unity of the whole humankind. The Church has to be committed to heal all sorts of divisions both in the Church and in the world, divisions in the name of race, caste, class, culture, language, economy, power, ideologies and religion. This is the greatest challenge before the Churches today.

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Ministry in Ecumenical Dialogue: Points of Convergence and Areas of Differences

Prabhakar Shadrack

Since divided Christianity is a counter-witness to its own teachings and confessions the importance of the Ecumenical Movement cannot be exaggerated. The main concern of the movement has been the visible unity of Christ's Church and it has made tremendous progress in the last 50 years. By its multilateral and bilateral contacts and conversations and dialogues areas of convergence have been widened. The author recounts the points of convergence and areas of differences.

Introduction

The 20th century is recognized as an Ecumenical Century in the history of the Christian Church. The search for the visible unity of Christ's Church has been the main concern and focus of the Ecumenical Movement. Because, down the centuries, the common life in the Body of Christ has been distorted by the division between East and West and between Rome and Reformers.

There was a growing general recognition before and even more so after the turn of this century that the reality of a divided Christianity is a counter-witness against the confession of the one Church and thus contradicts the gift, will and prayer of Jesus Christ. This recognition brought about the modern Ecumenical Movement which sought to reverse the Church history of division to movement towards unity¹.

The foundation and goal of Ecumenical Movement is based on the prayer of Jesus Christ, "that they all may be one" (John 17:21). Hundreds of international Conferences, Consultations and Meetings have taken place around the world during this century in order to bring the divided Churches together to share, discuss and consider the common concerns and historic differences. The World Council of

1. Gunther Gassman, "Unity" *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1971).

Churches (WCC) has played a very major and important role in this task. The WCC through its various Commissions has made tremendous contributions during the last 50 years to the Ecumenical Movement. One of its remarkable achievements has been through its Commission on Faith and Order, which provided the forum for the most sustained and cumulative treatment of doctrinal matters and devoted a good deal of attention to overcoming doctrinal divisions in the Churches. For this, the Faith and Order Commission initiated a process of study on three major themes – Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry which is also popularly known as BEM process.

The BEM process developed through a period of more than 50 years. It took four World Conferences, Lausanne 1927, Edinburgh 1937, Lund 1952 and Montreal 1963 and also ten plenary meetings of Faith and Order Commission from 1949 to 1982. The study on these themes were initiated and developed at different times. The text on Eucharist was produced first in 1967, followed by the text on Baptism in 1968 and finally the text on Ministry was brought out in 1972. These were discussed and revised several times in the successive meetings. A full text entitled "One Baptism, One Eucharist and A Mutually Recognized Ministry" was formulated for the first time by the Faith and Order Commission which met in Accra in 1974. This was circulated to the member Churches for Evaluation and Theological Responses. On the basis of the Responses received from the Churches, the Faith and Order Commission gave the final form to the text which became the historical Convergence text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. It is also known as Lima text, for it was in Lima, Peru in 1982 that Faith and Order Commission unanimously voted on this Convergence text.

Bilateral inter-confessional talks within the Ecumenical Movement gained in importance during the Sixties. The Vatican II has been the major inspiration to the bilateral conversations. Infact, it is the Roman Catholic Church, after the Second Vatican Council, which initiated and also inaugurated a series of bilateral conversations with almost all the major traditions of the Church.

In the Sixties, bilateral conversations between Churches of the different traditions began to play a bigger role and today the network of these dialogues is such that it has become very difficult to keep track of developments and results in all of them².

The decade of 1970's was a time when the Churches were able to reach a number of pioneering theological agreements, both through the multilateral dialogues initiated by WCC Faith and Order Commission

2. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, eds., *Growth in Agreement* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p.2

and also through the bilateral conversations initiated by the Roman Catholic Church. They are all very important. However, the scope and focus of this paper is limited only to the topic of "Ministry in Ecumenical Dialogue: Points of Convergence and Areas of Differences" based on Lima text of BEM and bilateral ecumenical conversations on a world level.

Ministry in Ecumenical Discussion: Brief Historical Background

"Ministry has certainly been one of the thorniest of all ecumenical topics, the main sticking point in failed union negotiation around the world."³ Ministry in the Church has been a focal point of discussion since the origins of the ecumenical movement. The discussion on ministry began as early as 1927 at the first World Conference of Faith and Order which took place in Lausanne, Switzerland. A section was devoted for the topic "The Ministry of the Church". According to the report on section V, the members of the Faith and Order expressed substantial accord on the following five propositions and noted some important points of difference which have provided the basis for further discussion on Ministry in the following years.

1. The Ministry is a gift of God through Christ to His Church and is essential to the being and well-being of the Church.
2. The Ministry is perpetually authorised and made effective through Christ and His Spirit.
3. The purpose of the Ministry is to impart to men the saving and the sanctifying benefits of Christ through pastoral service, the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments to be made effective by Faith.
4. The Ministry is entrusted with the government and the discipline of the Church, in whole or in part.
5. Men gifted for the work of the ministry, called by the Spirit and accepted by the Church, are commissioned through an act of ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands to exercise the function of this ministry⁴.

The important points of difference concern the nature of the ministry (whether consisting of one or several orders), the nature of ordination and of the grace conferred thereby, the function and authority of bishops and the nature of apostolic succession.

3. Michael Kinnamon, *Why It Matters: A Popular Introduction to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1985), p.30.

4. Lukas Vischer, ed., *A Documentary History of Faith and Order Movement* (St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1963), pp. 34-35.

No substantial advance was made on Lausanne's in terms of any new common agreements or disappearance of differences ten years later when the second World Conference of Faith and Order met in Edinburgh. Direct study on the Ministry more or less ceased between Edinburgh 1937 and Montreal 1963. Ministry as a formal subject of consideration returned to the Faith and Order agenda at the fourth World Conference in 1963 at Montreal. In response to the discussion at Montreal, a study on Ministry was undertaken. This progressed in several stages. The first-fruits were presented to the Commission on Faith and Order at its meeting in Louvain. The Commission considered that substantial progress had been made and requested that the work be continued. As a result of this new mandate, an international consultation was organised in Marseilles in 1972. The text produced by this meeting was distributed to a large number of groups and theologians for their reactions and comments. In the light of their responses, the text was revised at the next consultation in Geneva in 1973 before being submitted to the Faith and Order Commission at its meeting in Accra.

Lima Text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

"Ecumenical History was made in January 1982 in Lima, Peru. At the triennial meeting of the World Council's Faith and Order Commission, about 100 theologians voted unanimously to transmit to the Churches a major convergence document on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."⁵ The aim of the text is to be part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian tradition on essential elements of Christian communion.

The Lima text represents the significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has discerned and formulated. Virtually all the confessional traditions are included in the Commission's membership. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the Commission also includes among its full members theologians of the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches which do not belong to the WCC itself. It is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement that theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

The BEM document, adopted by the Faith and Order Commission in Lima, in 1982, has since then led to a process of discussion, exchange and response which is of major ecumenical significance. It is the most important document on multilateral

5. Max Thurian, ed., *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper 116* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1983), p. 186.

ecumenical dialogues. It is interesting to note that the Lima text published by WCC as Faith and Order, Paper No. 111 has become the most widely distributed text in the history of the Ecumenical Movement, with 24 reprints and 85,000 copies of Geneva edition alone and also 31 translations and a total distribution of more than 400,000 copies all over the world. It has also received 186 official responses which are published in six volumes.

The section on Ministry is the longest of the three sections of BEM. It is divided into six main sections which are further divided into several sub-sections covering 55 paragraphs with commentary on certain paragraphs. The text has also four questions which the Churches were asked to answer in their responses. The responses include General Responses and Responses to the three sections Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Those to the section on Ministry are broadly summarised under ten topics. But before that, some general responses which are noteworthy are as follows:

All the Responses welcome the fact that the BEM has been presented as a "Convergence Document". This Convergence on the understanding of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, which also includes agreements, is usually considered as an important achievement for the ecumenical movement, for the self-understanding and renewal of the Churches, and for the further steps towards visible unity⁶. With a few exceptions, all the responses applaud the ecumenical achievement represented by Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Such positive, sometimes enthusiastic, appraisal comes from Churches of all traditions and from all parts of the world. A cross section of examples suffices to illustrate this.

The Roman Catholic response affirms that "BEM is perhaps the most significant result of the Faith and Order Movement so far"⁷. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has greeted the Lima document with joy as the fruit of the efforts made during recent decades by the Commission on Faith and Order of WCC. The American Apostolic Church says: "This initial consensus, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the universal Church in our time, fills us with hope for solid progress in the coming decades"⁸. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church feels that this is an extremely important milestone in the ecumenical movement. The Episcopal Church in USA and the

6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982 - 1990: Report on the Process and Responses, Faith and Order Paper No. 149* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1990) p.31

7. Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text* (Geneva: WCC publication, 1986), Vol. VI, p.2.

8. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.30

Lutheran Church in America both rejoice over the convergence in the text and calls it as the work of healing and reconciliation. The Reformed Church in Hungary welcomes the Lima document. The Church of Jesus Christ of Madagascar praises God for the Lima document. The United Church of Christ in Japan sees in BEM "a significant contribution, concrete as well as theological, to the unity of Christian Church, calling the various Churches into dialogue"⁹. The United Methodists rejoice and praise the unique event in Church history. The American Baptist Churches in the USA respond with thanks to God for the BEM document. Burma Baptist Convention responds too with a spirit of thanksgiving. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines call BEM document as a milestone/landmark. The joint responses of Seventh Day Adventists term BEM as "Unquestionably one of the WCC most significant publications to date"¹⁰. The Catholic Church encourages Faith and Order to continue its valuable work for seeking unity in faith as the basis for visible unity and recommits itself to this process. The Roman Catholic Response further remarks, "Theologians coming from groups that were historically often in direct confrontation and disagreement with each other, now together claimed agreement and / or convergence on key issues of faith. This is itself a remarkable achievement"¹¹. The Marthoma Syrian Church of Malabar affirms: "The Ecumenical Movement can be proud of the distance travelled towards this agreed statement"¹². The Uniting Church in Australia sees the significance of BEM in its challenge to the Churches to reconsider their own positions of faith and practice and to open them up to the wider horizon and enrichment offered to them by the insights and experiences of other Churches. The Russian Orthodox Church considers BEM as "a step forward towards greater catholicity, i.e., greater proximity to the apostolic tradition, to the faith and practice of the early Church"¹³.

I do not want to reproduce the Lima text on ministry here. The Content and especially the Responses to the section on Ministry can be outlined as follows:

1. *The calling of the whole people of God*: All Churches seem to have appreciated the leading question of this section. The responses have unanimously welcomed the text of the Ministry. The responses affirm the approach of making the calling of the whole people of God the context for reflection on the ministry and many find an important ecclesiological statement here, firmly based on a sound Trinitarian theology. The United Methodist Church (USA) sees in this text "a superb re-telling of the biblical history of

9. *Ibid.*, p.287.

10. *Ibid.*, p.337.

11. Thurian, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p.2.

12. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 13.

13. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.5.

God's saving work, extended beyond apostolic times to all history... This foundational narrative belongs to Christians of all generations and gives form and substance to every theory of ministry, lay or ordained ¹⁴.

2. *The Church and the Ordained Ministry*: For the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic and Anglican responses the presiding over the Lord's table is necessarily reserved for an ordained minister. Most Lutheran and Reformed responses agree but on the basis of their understanding of the relation between Eucharist and ordained ministry – there might be exceptions in situations where theologically trained ordained pastors are not available for pastoral and liturgical functions. Such exceptions are also in the case of Free churches.
3. *Ordained Ministry and Authority*: With very few exceptions the responses welcome the specific authority of the ordained ministry. The Orthodox Church in America, Lutheran Church in Australia and Baptist Union of Sweden accept this, while some Lutheran Churches in Estonia and Hanover cannot accept the thought that there is a special teaching authority conferred by God to ordained ministers ¹⁵.
4. *Ordained Ministry and Priesthood*: For many responses this text is an acceptable bridge between different traditions and terminologies. The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Responses, however, see a danger that the distinctive sacramental priesthood of the ordained ministers is put side by side with the priesthood of all believers ¹⁶. On the other side of the spectrum of responses a number of Churches, e.g., Marthoma Syrian Church of Malabar, Presbyterian Church in Wales, Methodist Church in Ireland, suggest avoiding the title "priest" because it could be seen as prejudging the unique priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all believers ¹⁷.
5. *The ministry of men and women in the Church*: A number of Churches which ordain women regret that BEM has not come forward with a more positive stance towards this position. United Methodist Church (USA) affirm that the "willingness to ordain women is required if we are to remain faithful to our understanding of the Gospel" ¹⁸. Similarly Lutheran Church in America also affirm "Our commitment to the ordination of women is an integral part of our obedience to the Gospel" ¹⁹. Presbyterian Church in USA

14. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

15. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 44, 53.

16. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 21, 27; Vol. VI, p. 30.

17. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 12; Vol. II, pp. 122, 234.

18. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 195.

19. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 35.

emphasize "the ordination of women is a faithful expression of the apostolic tradition"²⁰. "We see the ministry of women as a gift to the Church from the Holy Spirit"²¹, say the Disciples of Christ. From the side of Churches which do not ordain women like Russian Orthodox Church criticised BEM for showing "a clear tendency to solve the problem favourably"²². The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR underlines that the decision of each Church on this issue "should be respected by other Churches in such a way that it does not present any obstacles for the mutual recognition of ministries"²³.

6. *The forms of the Ordained Ministry*: In general there is an affirmation of this part of the Ministry section. There is considerable appreciation for the prescription of the development of the threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon. Churches with the traditional episcopal structure welcome the plea for the restoration of the threefold pattern for the sake of unity. But there are also many responses from the Reformation and Free Churches which, while not necessarily rejecting the threefold pattern in principle, especially if it is not understood in a hierarchical sense, reject or at least question the normative character of the threefold pattern²⁴.
7. *Guiding principles for the exercise of the ordained ministry in the Church*: Most of the responses have endorsed the statements in this part of the text. They also see in them the challenges to the ways in which the exercise of ministry and the structures guiding this exercise are ordered in their own churches. Several episcopal churches especially Anglicans in Australia, Canada and New Zealand plead for the inclusion of the lay people in the synods of the Church²⁵.
8. *Functions of bishops, presbyters and deacons*: Reactions to the descriptions of the functions of these ministries vary. Some responses seem to see no problem here. Reformation and Free Churches express a functional understanding of *episkope*. They are Church of Scotland, Church of Norway and Reformed Church of America²⁶. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches emphasize that it is more than a function of overseeing next to other functions and ministries. It is also "a sacramental sign of

20. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. III, p. 200.

21. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p.120.

22. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.9.

23. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982 - 90*, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

24. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 138.

25. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982 - 90*, *op.cit.*, p.82.

26. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p.86; Vol. II, pp.120, 149.

27. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol.VI, p.33; Vol.II, pp.9, 28; Vol.III, pp.13, 20,57.

integration and a focus of communion"²⁷. Though they are prepared to widen the meaning and function of *episkope*, they still value episcopacy as the supreme and indispensable sacramental form of such *episkope*.

9. *Succession in the Apostolic tradition*: The distinction (not separation) between "apostolic tradition" and "succession of the apostolic ministry" has been widely accepted in the responses as an important ecumenical step forward in the difficult issue of apostolic succession. The Church of North India, "commends the broad interpretation of apostolic succession in BEM as a helpful approach to bringing the so called episcopal and non-episcopal churches closer to each other without denying their own heritage"²⁸. Roman Catholic and Orthodox responses however emphasize that the character of episcopal succession as a guarantee and effective sign must be safe-guarded as a condition for unity and recognition of ministry.
10. *Towards the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries*: Not too many churches have specifically reacted to this concluding part of the ministry section of BEM dealing with steps towards mutual recognition of ministries. The responses clearly reveal different positions on this issue. On the one hand, there are many Churches of the Reformation and Free Church traditions which show a willingness to recognize the ministry of other Churches including episcopal churches. However the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches are not ready to move towards such an act of recognition of ministries in non-episcopal churches. They believe that ordained ministry requires sacramental ordination by a bishop standing in the apostolic succession.

Bilateral Conversations

Bilateral conversations have been greatly influenced by the Ecumenical Movement. The new bilateral dialogues especially at the world level have enhanced the significance and weight of world confessional families. The bilateral dialogues are manifestations of the ecumenical search for unity and at the same time a distinct approach to it. Bilateral conversations constitute a new phenomenon drawing strength from an unprecedented concurrence of ecumenical and confessional tides.

The bilateral conversations around the world form a movement of theological exploration and discovery which indeed has yielded truly remarkable results. The advances and convergences that are taking place appear all the more striking...

28. Thurian, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.73.

in several instances they are bridging age-long chasms within Christendom, and that all this has taken place within the short span of a few years²⁹.

A number of bilateral conversations over the years have taken place between different Christian Churches and Communions. Ministry has been a central issue in at least eight bilateral dialogues at the world level. The most important among them are, Anglican – Roman Catholic, Lutheran – Roman Catholic, Methodist – Roman Catholic, Pentecostal – Roman Catholic and Reformed – Roman Catholic. In all these conversations, the Roman Catholic Church is involved.

Vatican II certainly opened up new opportunities for better relations between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches which are mentioned above. At the Second Vatican Council there were official observers representing these Churches and after the Council, the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity initiated and inaugurated a series of bilateral conversations with other Churches beginning with the Anglican Communion after a historic meeting of Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI, on March 23, 1966 in Rome. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communions were separated for more than 400 years. But in a joint declaration on March 24, 1966, the leaders of these Churches expressed openly their desire to initiate “a serious dialogue which founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions may lead to the unity in truth for which Christ prayed”³⁰. The Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was established. The most important achievement of ARCIC is the Canterbury Statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry and Ordination agreed by ARCIC in their meeting at Canterbury in 1973.

The bilateral conversations between Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and Roman Catholic Church also began after a separation of more than 400 years. They are also the results of the contacts made by LWF and Roman Catholic Church at the time of Second Vatican Council. The progress made by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission on the topic of Ministry is reflected in the statement brought out by the Commission on “The Ministry in the Church” in 1981.

The bilateral conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches also began almost in the same manner and around the same time after Vatican II. Apart from the bilateral dialogues in

29. Nils Ehrenstrom, ed., *Confessions in Dialogue Faith and Order* Paper No. 74 (Geneva: WCC publication, 1972), p.230

30. Colin Davey, Appendix “ARCIC's Discussion of the Doctrine of the Ministry” in *Modern Ecumenical Documents on the Ministry*, by H.R. McA doo, (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 38.

which the Roman Catholic Church is involved, some bilateral dialogues at the world level have also taken place between other Churches. Some of the important ones are, Anglican - Lutheran, Anglican - Orthodox and Anglican - Methodist. All the Churches and Communions which participated in the bilateral dialogues have also actively participated in the multilateral dialogues of BEM. A critical evaluation reveals that both multilateral and bilateral dialogues on Ministry have generally addressed the same issues and have also drawn almost the same conclusions.

Therefore, the most important points of convergence and areas of differences on Ministry in the multilateral and bilateral ecumenical dialogues can be summed up as follows:

The points of convergence are:

1. *Apostolic Ministry:* The fundamental ministry is Christ's own ministry, which is the ministry of reconciliation and building up the community. Ministry is also a gift because, the calling and commissioning of people for the ministry is God's initiative and work. In a broken world God calls the whole of humanity to become God's people. The ministry is given to the whole Church and all the members can share and participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ.
2. *Ministry and Mission:* The Church is called to proclaim and prefigure the Kingdom of God. In Jesus the Kingdom of God came among us. He offered Salvation to sinners. He preached good news to the poor... Ministry in the Church means emulating this way of Christ.
3. *Priesthood:* The term Priesthood is used and understood differently by different Church traditions. It refers to the ordained ministry as well as the ministry of all people.
4. *The Ordained Ministry:* Ordination is essential for the ministry. Although the ministry is given to the whole Church, the function of the ordained ministry has a very special place and function in the Church. Ordination is an action by God and the community by which the ordained are strengthened by the Spirit for their task and are upheld by the congregation. A person called by God and ordained by the Church is commissioned for life long ministry. In most of the Churches only an ordained person can preside over at the Eucharist.
5. *Ministry and authority:* The authority of the ordained ministry is not a possession but a gift to be used for the building up of the community. The authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ who received it from the Father. Christ's authority is unique. This authority is governed by love.

6. *The threefold pattern of ordained ministry*: Although there is no single N.T. pattern, historically and traditionally the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon has become the generally and most widely accepted pattern of the ordained ministry in the Church.
7. *Collegiality*: The ministry of over seeing is accepted by all church traditions although it may be practiced differently in the episcopal and non episcopal Churches. But it is a necessary function. The ministry at all levels should not only be personal but also collegial.

The areas of differences are centred around the following three major issues. They are:

1. *Apostolic Succession*: The question of apostolic succession has been a crucial issue in both multilateral and bilateral dialogues. The primary manifestations of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole. The apostolic succession of ordained ministry is also a powerful sign. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches strongly emphasize the latter aspect and for them the ministry is made authentic only through this apostolic succession of ordination. Therefore this issue stands in the way of mutual recognition of the ministries of the Churches.
2. *Ordination of women*: This is another issue which has not found acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches. There are a number of Churches, including the Anglican Church, which practise the ordination of women. They do not find any theological argument against the ordination of women. However the issue remains a controversial subject and may not be resolved easily.
3. *Papal primacy*: This subject has not yet come up for any discussion so far in any of the multilateral and bilateral dialogues at the world level except some recent reference to it by the Anglican Church. But sooner or later it can become a major issue in ecumenical discussions. As and when this matter will come up for discussion, it can raise several problems on the question of authority in the Church.

Conclusion

The Ecumenical Movement has come a long way and has achieved tremendous growth and development in the last 50 years. The Churches have been influenced and challenged greatly to draw closer to each other in the spirit of unity and cooperation. The multilateral and bilateral dialogues at the world level are the evidence

that the Churches and Christian communions are willing to resolve their differences and strengthen the common Christian witness. The entire process of BEM initiated by WCC through its Faith and Order Commission has brought the Churches into a new stage of mutual accountability and is in itself an expression of growth towards visible unity. The participation of Roman Catholic Church in the Ecumenical movement after the Second Vatican Council and the series of bilateral dialogues that followed, have further strengthened the efforts for mutual understanding and cooperation between the Churches towards the goal of unity. The Churches can rejoice over and be encouraged by the positive results of ecumenical dialogue on Ministry so far and at the same time continue the good work with faith until the total unity is achieved.

The unity is God's work. What has been already achieved and experienced in the Ecumenical Movement is an outpouring of God's blessings. There will be a new season of grace if the Churches will continue in their commitment to work towards the goal of visible unity.

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Primacy and Churches of the Reformation at the Threshold of the Third Millennium

Gerwin van Leeuwen

The author takes up the all-important question, in the Ecumenical Movement, of Papacy which has been traditionally the greatest obstacle to Christian unity among Churches. A fresh opening to the question is provided in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*. The author proceeds to show how the question has been seriously discussed at different levels and in its different aspects in the Roman Catholic dialogues with Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Orthodox Churches as well as in synods and bishops' conferences and in Cardinal dialogues. It is not difficult to spot therein an enriching convergence.

The world too strong for a divided Church

The unity of his disciples was one of Jesus' greatest wishes on the eve of his passion and death, 'That they [who believe in Jesus through the apostolic word] may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.' (Jn 17:20-21) Years ago, Dr. Visser 't Hooft, one of the great pioneers of the ecumenical movement and the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, observed, 'The world is too strong for a divided church.' A truly prophetic word: the divided church seems to lose out in the power game of the secular world, and in the attraction of eastern religions and new religious movements.

Christ's last wish

It is obvious that the present dividedness of the church is against God's will. We consider a person's last wish before his death almost sacred and are ready to go out of our way to fulfil that last wish. Yet we do not seem to take Jesus' fervent plea for unity during the Last Supper with his close associates very seriously. Also within the Roman Catholic Church there are costly and scandalous divisions even at the local level. 'Any discrimination against men [sic!] or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or

religion', teaches Vatican II, 'is foreign to the mind of Christ'¹. What about our dividedness because of language, caste or Rite? is it strange that the world does not believe?

John Paul II's surprising invitation

This article takes up one particular question which traditionally is a major hurdle to the Churches' quest for Christian unity: the papacy. Till very recently it seemed a nearly unsurmountable obstacle. However, John Paul II's encyclical '*Ut Unum Sint*', which the Board of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches considers a sign 'of real progress in the dialogue and mutual understanding of the churches'², seems to open new horizons: the bishop of Rome himself invites Church leaders and their theologians to engage with him

in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject [the primacy and its ministry of unity], a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:21)³.

The functioning of the primacy should be transparent and visible, because both Faith and Order and John Paul II agree that

Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God's faithfulness, his Spirit dwells⁴.

John Paul asserts that as Bishop of Rome he shoulders a particular responsibility as regards the quest of all Jesus' disciples and ecclesial communions and communities for visible unity, but he emphatically admits that he should not and cannot exercise this responsibility without

acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation. For a whole millennium Christians were united in 'brotherly fraternal communion of faith and sacramental life... If disagreements in belief and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator'⁵.

1. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* (NA) 5. 2. *Ecumenical Review* (ER) 1998/2/251.

3. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (UUS) 65.

4. Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR) 14, UUS 95.

5. Message of the Holy Father to His Holiness Dimitrios I on the occasion of the

The way the Bishop of Rome exercises the office of primacy greatly differs from the way it was done during the first millennium. 'The centuries during which we were like strangers to one another have occasioned a decrease of mutual knowledge and hence of reciprocal love. This explains how misunderstandings and caricatures of the faith really professed by Catholics or by the Orthodox were able to be diffused quite widely on both sides'⁶. One year earlier during the personal visit of Dimitrios I, Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch, the Holy Father humbly admitted the tremendous historical developments in the understanding and exercise of the primacy since Ignatius of Antioch spoke of the Bishop of Rome's presiding in charity. It is in this context that John Paul II said in his homily:

I am aware that, for a great variety of reasons and against the will of all concerned, what should have been a service sometimes manifested itself in a very different light. But, as you know, it is out of a desire to obey the will of Christ truly that I recognize that as Bishop of Rome, I am called to exercise that ministry. Thus, in view of perfect communion which we wish to establish, I insistently pray the Holy Spirit to shine his light among us, enlightening all the pastors and theologians of our Churches, that we seek – together, of course, – the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned⁷.

Openness to Primacy

As the exercise of primacy is one of the most obvious fields of doctrinal disagreement, it is but natural that it has been taken up explicitly in the dialogue between churches and ecclesial Communions, often called 'Conversations'. It is difficult to assess their influence on the Pope's epoch-making invitation to fraternal dialogue on exercise of the primacy but it is important to recognize that the Spirit has been preparing this invitation to church leaders and their theologians in various ways, for example,

- i. the recognition of the World Council of Churches and the ever greater participation of Roman Catholic Church leaders and theologians in their studies and activities, especially in the work of its Commission for Faith and Order.

Feast of Saint Andrew, *Oss. Rom.*, eng. ed., n. 51-52, 19-26 December, 1988,9.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Homily of Pope John Paul II on Sunday, 6 December 1987, in St. Peter's Basilica, *Oss. Rom.*, eng. ed., n.51-52, 21-28 December, 1987, *UUS* 95 quotes a part of this passage.

- ii. the close association with the Second Vatican Council of church leaders and theologians of other Churches and ecclesial communions. As fraternal delegates they could see with their own eyes the collegial and participative functioning, of the Council, and share their views and feelings with the Council fathers. A number of them were involved, at least indirectly, in the drafting of the documents and occasionally, a few of them were invited to address the Council in session.
- iii. the direct conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches.
- iv. the close cooperation between the churches at various local, regional and national levels. Though the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches, in some countries it is a full member of the National Council of Churches.
- v. the charismatic character of Pope John XXIII and his successors who showed that life is stronger than doctrine.

Anglican-Roman Catholic Conversations

i. *The Venice Statement* on 'Authority in the Church' (1976) considers the *episcopate* (overseeing) of the ordained ministry a gift of the Spirit for the edification of the church. Within and as part of the community of believers ordained ministers, and particularly the bishops, are commissioned to discern a deeper understanding of the gospel and of its implications in diverse cultures and situations and authoritatively express them, taking into account that the Spirit can reveal God's design through any member. Thus the Holy Spirit keeps the church under the Lordship of Christ⁸.

The authoritative proclamation of the Gospel in the world does not belong to the responsibilities of each church acting separately, but of all the local churches together. 'Ever since the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) the churches have realized the need to express and strengthen the *koinonia* by coming together to discuss matters of mutual concern and to meet contemporary challenges': ecumenical or regional councils, synods. Certain sees, especially those of Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome played a prominent role in the search for and proclamation of the will of Christ and making the Church's witness more effectively. Eventually the see of Rome became 'the principal centre in matters concerning the Church universal.'

The First Vatican Council affirmed that this service was necessary to the unity of the whole Church. Far from overriding

8. Venice Statement, 1976, no. 4-7, in: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World level*, Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (eds), Paulist Press, New York, WCC, Geneva, 1984, 91-92.

the authority of the bishops in their own dioceses, this service was explicitly intended to support them in their ministry of overseeing. The Second Vatican Council placed this service in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops. The teaching of these councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches. The purpose of the episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is to promote Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles.

Primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his overseeing in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and to one another. Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches. A local church cannot be truly faithful to Christ if it does not desire to foster universal communion, the embodiment of that unity for which Christ prayed⁹.

If God's will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcopate* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level. The only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such episcopate is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died.

It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see¹⁰.

The Venice Statement shows that the real hurdle is not the primacy as such, nor the primacy of the see of Rome and its bishop, but the way the primacy is exercised and in particular the relationship between the bishop of Rome and his brother bishops all over the world, that is, the praxis of collegiality. Though the last section of the Statement frankly mentions some of the difficulties regarding the papal primacy and its exercise which will continue to be obstacles to greater communion between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches, the delegates hold that 'this Statement on Authority in the Church represents a significant convergence with far reaching consequences'¹¹.

ii. Five years later (1981) the Delegates of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches issued a second document on 'Authority

9. *Idem*, no. 12-13, p. 93-94.

10. *Idem*, no.23, p. 97.

11. *Idem*, no. 25, p. 98.

in the Church', the *Windsor Statement*, which shows substantial agreement on four issues that had caused anxiety among many Anglicans and filled them with apprehension: the understanding of the Petrine texts, the question whether the primacy of the bishop of Rome is "of divine right", that is, whether it is really God's will for the Church of Christ or not, the issue of papal infallibility and the exercise of the primate's universal jurisdiction. The Windsor Statement reads:

The universal primate should exercise, and be seen to exercise, his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops [see Venice Statement, n. 21 and 23]. This in no way reduces his own responsibility on occasion to speak and act for the whole Church... But the universal primate is not the source from which diocesan bishops derive their authority, nor does his authority undermine that of the metropolitan or diocesan bishop. Primacy is not an autocratic power over the Church but a service in and to the Church which is a communion in faith and charity of local churches¹².

The Vatican Response to ARCIC-I

The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) made the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Conversations, that is, the four Statements¹³ and the three elucidations of their own; one generally refers to them as ARCIC-I¹⁴. The Vatican response to this previous document, prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in consultation with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, dated 4 December 1991, greatly appreciates the Report: 'it is a significant milestone not only in relations between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion but in the ecumenical movement as a whole'¹⁵. The 'Explanatory Note', which constitutes the body of the Vatican's response, observes that on the question of authority in the Church, the Report does not claim 'substantial agreement', though a certain convergence has been achieved¹⁶. It points out the importance of the fact that the Anglicans recognise that a 'primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not contrary to the New Testament, and is part of God's purpose regarding the Church's unity and

12. Windsor Statement, 1981, no. 19, in: *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., p. 111.

13. Eucharistic Doctrine, Windsor Statement, 1971, Ministry and Ordination, Canterbury Statement, 1973, Authority in the Church I, Venice Statement, 1976, Authority in the Church II, Windsor Statement, 1981.

14. See: Kevin McDonald, 'Development of Response to ARCIC-I, Information of Holy See's reply', *Oss.Rom.*, eng. ed., 29 January, 1992, 5-6.

15. *Oss.Rom.*, eng. ed., 16 Dec. 1991, 21.

16. See: McDonald, a.c., 6; also idem, 'Catholic Relations with the Anglican Communion; New Archbishop of Canterbury hopes to visit the Holy Father in the near future, *Oss. Rom.* eng.ed., 19 February, 1992,10.

Catholicity' After stating that most of the Anglican reservations regarding the Roman primacy concern the way in which it is exercised, it notes that in the past the relations between Roman Catholics and Anglicans did not encourage study of the 'positive significance of the Roman primacy in the life of the universal Church'¹⁷. The cordial relationships of today create a climate in which Anglicans may 'recognise the development of the Roman primacy as a gift of divine providence'. Serious reservations, however, remain as regards the primate's guaranteed possession of divine assistance in judgements (infallibility) and his 'universal primacy as a permanent institution... directly founded by Jesus during his life on earth'.

This response of the Congregation clearly shows that the road towards unity is a long and tough one. The question of Authority in the Church is crucial, because 'The value of any consensus reached in regard to other matters will to a large extent depend on the authority of the body which eventually endorses them'¹⁸.

The Anglican Communion

In the Anglican Communion the Synod of each of the 23 Anglican Provinces is autonomous, but it is significant that the then Archbishop of Canterbury and President of the authoritative Lambeth Conference¹⁹, Dr. Runcie reported to the Holy Father after the 1988 Lambeth Conference:

The Bishops, by a very large majority, recognized the ARCIC Agreed Statements on the Eucharist and the Ordained Ministry as 'consonant in substance with the faith of the Anglicans'. On authority the Agreed Statements were welcomed as 'a firm basis' for the future dialogue. The full text of the resolution states that 'this agreement offers a sufficient basis for taking the next step forward towards the reconciliation of our Churches grounded in agreement of faith'²⁰.

The Ordination of Women as Testcase

One particular issue has become a serious setback in the two Communions' growth towards each other: the ordination of women. In his reply to Dr. Runcie's letter, the Holy Father, therefore, replied, that women's ordination seems to pre-empt the study of all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our Communions 'and effectively block the road to the mutual recognition of ministries'. It is,

17. *Idem*

18. *Oss.Rom.*, eng.ed., 16 December, 1991, 22.

19. The assembly of all the bishops of the Anglican Communion; it meets every ten years, but has no legislative power.

20. See: Kevin McDonald, *a.c.*, 6.

therefore, urgent that ARCIC-II sufficiently and seriously considers the ecumenical and ecclesiological dimensions of the question 'in order to prevent a serious erosion of the degree of communion between us'²¹. This has made women's ordination almost a test case as regards the functioning of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. However, both the church leaders continue to emphasize in their respective Communions that Anglicans and Catholics need

to rediscover together their common patrimony of faith. Fidelity to that patrimony is the indispensable basis for further progress toward unity... The pope and the archbishop spoke of the ordination of women to the priesthood. The archbishop expressed his conviction that this development is a possible and proper development of the doctrine of the ordained ministry. The Holy Father reiterated what has already been said to Dr. Carey's predecessors, that this development constitutes a decision which the church does not see itself entitled to authorize and which constitutes a grave obstacle to the whole process of Anglican-Roman Catholic reconciliation. It was agreed, however, that there must be further study of the ecclesial and ecumenical aspects of this question²².

The Anglicans find it difficult to come to terms with the Vatican Response. Dr. George Carey, Dr. Runcie's successor as Archbishop of Canterbury, stated at Malines, Belgium,

Anglicans cannot pretend to be anything other than disappointed by the Vatican Response to ARCIC-I; Roman Catholics are confused and disoriented by the movement throughout Anglicanism world wide to ordain women to the priesthood... Hopes for organic unity seem to have faded; the communion for which our Lord prayed sometimes *seems* as far off as ever... Dreams and visions seem to have faded into a mist of disappointment and a mood of resigned realism.

Dr. Carey admitted at the same time that Anglicans have 'become immeasurably richer' through their ecumenical contacts with Roman Catholics, but he felt that Catholics have also something to learn from the Anglican tradition.

The role of representative laity in a synodically governed church complements the conciliarity of bishops. Our tradition of tolerance, enriched by the Anglo-Saxon intellectual environment, offers a climate in which forms of theology can flourish which are both free and loyal to the tradition. And then our slow but

21. *Idem*.

22. Joint press release at the occasion of the meeting of Pope John Paul II and Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury, *Origins* 22/4 (4 June, 1992) 51, 53.

eventual realization of the role of women within the church, both lay and ordained, does, I am convinced, point to a legitimate development within the tradition of Western Christianity²³.

During the last decade women's ordination has actually become the concrete issue which manifests the functioning of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Undoubtedly the former is one of the most crucial and sensitive subjects in further ecumenical conversations, especially because the Vatican has taken a very strong stand on this issue²⁴. However important the issue is in itself, the focus of this article is the functioning of the papacy. In this context it is not insignificant that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sent, with the approval of the Pope John Paul II, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church a letter on 'Some Aspects of the Church understood as Communion', which stated:

Since, however, communion with the universal Church, represented by Peter's successor, is not an external component to the particular Church, but one of its internal constituents, the situation of those venerable Christian communities [Eastern Orthodox Churches, GvL] also means that their existence as particular Churches is *wounded*. The wound is even deeper in those ecclesial communities which have not retained the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist. This in turn also injures the Catholic Church, called by the Lord to become for all 'one flock' with 'one shepherd', in that it hinders the fulfilment of her universality in history.

This situation seriously calls for ecumenical commitment on the part of everyone, with a view to achieving full communion in the unity of the Church, that unity 'which Christ bestowed on his Church

23. *Origins* 22/43 (8 April, 1993) 737.

24. See particularly: Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter '*Sacerdotalis Ordinatio*'. Pentecost, 22 May, 1994; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Reply to the *Dubium* concerning the teaching contained in the apostolic letter '*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,' and Cardinal Ratzinger's letter to the presidents of world's bishops' conferences, and the Vatican Reflections, sent together with the Reply to the *Dubium*, *Origins* 25/24 (30 November, 1995), 401-405; Avery Dulles' address at an executive of the U.S. Bishops' Conference on 26-6-1996 published in *Origins* 26/11 (29 August, 1996) 177-180; The Statement of the Board and Paper of the Committee of the Catholic Theological Society of America, *Origins* 27/5 (19 June 1997) 65-68, and the response to this Statement and Paper of CTSA by the National Conference of Catholic bishops' Committee on Doctrine, *Origins* 27/16 (2 October 1997) 267-271; National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, 'Ten Frequently Asked Questions About the Reservation of Priestly Ordination to Men' and 'From Words to Deeds: Continuing Reflections on the Role of Women in the Church', *Origins* 28/20 (29 October, 1998) 349-359.

from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time' (UR 4). In this ecumenical commitment, important priorities are prayer, penance, study, dialogue and collaboration, so that, through a new conversion to the Lord, all may be enabled to recognize the continuity of the primacy of Peter in his successors, the bishops of Rome, and to see the Petrine ministry fulfilled, in the manner intended by the Lord, as a worldwide apostolic service, which is present in all the Churches from within, and which, while preserving its substance as a divine institution, can find expression in various ways according to the different circumstances of time and place, as history has shown²⁵.

The Importance of the Primacy

In our context the last sentence is most important: the functioning of the bishops of Rome can be the subject of ecumenical dialogue and the divine institution of the primacy has been expressed in various ways and can, therefore, find new expressions in the future.

The Church of England itself, the mother church of the Anglican Communion, ordained its first 32 women priests on 12 March, 1994 in Bristol Cathedral, though member churches of the Anglican Communion had already been ordaining women priests since 1975. The Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales regretted this step which they called a 'serious obstacle' to unity between the Catholic and Anglican Churches. In a joint statement Archbishops George Carey of Canterbury and John Habgood of York spoke of 'a significant milestone in the long history of the Church of England... The majority of people within our Church believe it to be God's will... others, of course, believe the move to be mistaken.' Vatican spokesman Navarro Vallis said: 'The Catholic Church, for well-founded theological reasons, in fidelity to the teaching of Jesus Christ and to the uninterrupted practice throughout the centuries, does not believe it has the right to authorize such an ordination'²⁶. On 25 May, 1995, Pope John Paul II published his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, in which he invited Church leaders and their theologians to reflect together with him on how the functioning of the Bishop of Rome could serve the unity of all Christ's disciples better²⁷.

25. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on 'Some Aspects of the Church as Communion'', art. 17-18, d.d. 28-5-1992, *Oss. Rom.*, eng.ed., 17 June, 1992, 8/9: see also: Roland Minnerath, 'Petrine Principle in the First Millennium', *Oss. Rom.*, eng.ed., 19 February, 1992, 3 and 8.

26. *Origins* 23/24 (24 March, 1994) 694.

27. *UUS* 96. see above, p.1.

In this context the meeting between Archbishop Carey and Pope John Paul II gets special significance. During the Vesper service at the Church of St. Gregory both John Paul II and Archbishop Carey spoke about the functioning of the bishop of Rome. Pope John Paul II:

Ever since the time 18 years ago when divine providence entrusted me with the particular responsibility to be *servus servorum Dei*, I have been conscious that for many other Christians the ministry of Peter constitutes a difficulty, still overshadowed by painful memories. In ... *Ut unum sint* I have appealed for a patient and fraternal dialogue on the ministry of unity of the bishop of Rome (cf. Nos. 88, 95-96). So I pray this evening... for a hastening of the day when, without renouncing in any way what is essential to this ministry in accordance with Christ's will, we may together discover the forms in which it will be accepted by all Christians as a service of love²⁸.

The Head of the Anglican Communion raised the issue of the importance of primacy for the unity of the Church:

Any discussion within Anglicanism on the subject of primacy must address itself to the role of Gregory's successor as a tangible, historic focus for unity within worldwide Christianity. We cannot ignore our roots, for they too have shaped our identity. We cannot ignore our own commitment to the apostolic succession and the interrelationship between the historic episcopate and the continuity of the whole church in faithfulness to the original witness and teaching of the apostles.

If, however, diversity is an issue we must address, and in particular the legitimate limits of diversity within the body of Christ, we must also find ways in which the seeds of renewal and reformation in the life of the church may be celebrated and shared.²⁹

Dr. Carey then shared his deep regret over the tragic splits in the Western Church, but points out that the ecumenical pilgrimage especially of the last few decades have helped us rediscover precious treasures of the Christian heritage: the rediscovery of the Bible and its authority, of the importance of justification by faith, of the local church, of the servanthood of ministry and priesthood. 'To be sure, all these things were there in the ancient church, but they needed a rediscovery'. He stressed the need for reconciliation, also of memories, 'if we are to achieve the full, visible unity in Christ which is the will of God and to which both our churches are committed'. He then points out the fruits of the official dialogue through the Anglican-Roman Catholic

28. *Origins* 26/27 (19 December, 1996) 437, 439.

29. *Idem*, 441.

International Commission. At the end he directly addressed the Pope as follows:

Pope John Paul, you have in your distinguished ministry as Pope expressed the love of God to all in compassion and true Christian service. You have in *Ut unum sint* taken a courageous step in inviting other churches to talk with you about the role of your office in the search for full, visible unity. I and the ecumenical community honour you for that bold step. As your brother in Christ, let us walk together into a deeper unity which both of us know to be the will of our Lord. If we, representing our churches, are going to lead our people toward that goal, it can only be done by the generosity to forgive, by the willingness to tolerate diversity in matters outside the biblical core of our faith and by the humility to accept gifts from one another that may surprise and confound us³⁰.

It becomes ever more clear that the exercise of authority in the church is one of the key issues in ecumenical dialogue and conversations between the churches. Cardinal Edward Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, brought this out once again, when he spoke at the ecumenical Vespers during the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Quoting from ARCIC - I he said:

'A local church cannot be truly faithful to Christ if it does not desire to foster universal communion, the embodiment of that unity for which Christ prayed³¹.

The Cardinal then continued:

Is not some form of universal authority the necessary corollary of communion at a universal level, even while Christians are on the way toward full communion? Indeed the Spirit does bestow a diversity of gifts, but their purpose is that 'we all come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God' (Eph 4:13)³².

Up to now we have mainly followed the conversations and dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. I feel that this is justified, because, though the Eastern Orthodox Churches are ecclesologically closer, sharing the same faith and sacraments, the direct 'conversations' between Roman Catholics and Anglicans have in many ways paved the way and indicated a pattern for direct 'conversations' with other communions and churches.

30. *Idem*.

31. ARCIC-I, o.c., Authority in the Church I, 13, *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 94.

32. *Origins* 28/10 (13 August, 1998) 176.

Papal primacy and the Lutherans

We will now look at some of the reports of the Joint Lutheran - Roman Catholic Study Commission. The Report on 'The Gospel and the Church', known as the 'Malta Report' states the following on 'papal primacy':

The question of papal primacy emerges as a special problem for the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics. Catholics pointed to the beginning of this doctrine in the biblical witness concerning the special position of Peter and also to the differences in the understanding of the primacy in the first and second millennia. By its doctrine of episcopal collegiality, the Second Vatican Council placed the primacy in a new interpretive framework and thereby avoided a widespread one-sided and isolated way of understanding it. The primacy of jurisdiction must be understood as a ministerial service to the community and as a bond of the unity of the church. The service of unity is, above all, a service of unity in faith. The office of the papacy also includes the task of caring for legitimate diversity among local churches. The concrete shape of this office may greatly vary in accordance with changing historical conditions. It was recognized on the Lutheran side that no local church should exist in isolation since it is a manifestation of the universal church. In this sense the importance of a ministerial service of the communion of churches was acknowledged and at the same time reference was raised for the Lutherans by their lack of such an effective service of unity. The office of the papacy as a visible sign of the unity of the churches was therefore not excluded insofar as it is subordinated to the primacy of the gospel by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring. The question, however, which remains controversial between Catholics and Lutherans is whether the primacy of the pope is necessary for the church, or whether it represents only a fundamentally possible function. It was nevertheless agreed that the question of altar fellowship and of mutual recognition of ministerial offices should not be unconditionally dependent on a consensus on the question of primacy³³.

Eight years later the Joint Study Commission brought out the Report on 'Ways to Community'. Lutherans and Roman Catholics agree that a special ministry is needed for the proclamation of God's Word and for presiding 'over the liturgical and sacramental life of the eucharistic

33. Report of the Joint Lutheran Roman Catholic Study Commission on 'The Gospel and the Church', 1972 ('Malta Report'), no. 66-67, *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 184

community' however they differ on 'the concrete shape(s) of this ministry. Catholics believe that Jesus Christ willed that bishops, as successors of the apostles, should shepherd His Church. 'In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship' (LG 18). Lutherans hold that there is place for supracongregational ministries in the church. Though they do not consider the historic episcopacy 'an explicit irrevocable command from the Lord valid for all times and places', this policy is the work of the Spirit. Therefore,

"there are historical and ecumenical reasons for seriously considering its restoration in Lutheran churches. Further, a ministry serving the unity of the church as a whole is for Lutherans, in accord with the will of the Lord, but without its concrete form having been fixed once for all"³⁴.

In the introduction to the study on 'The Ministry in the Church' (1981) the Joint Commission points out that there are no major controversies on the christological and pneumatological questions regarding episcopal ministry. This does not include the issue of the papal office. The complex exegetical, historical and theological questions on the ministry of the bishop of Rome are so complex that a separate study is required³⁵.

There is, however, a section on 'The Episcopal Ministry and Service for the Universal Unity of the Church', in which both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran positions are briefly mentioned. This section concludes with the conclusion of the Malta Report:

In various dialogues, the possibility begins to emerge that the Petrine office of the Bishop of Rome also need not be excluded by Lutherans as a visible sign of the unity of the church as a whole, "insofar as [this office] is subordinated to the primacy of the gospel by theological reinterpretation and practical restructuring"³⁶.

Also in the World Lutheran Federation which appointed the Lutheran members on the Joint Study Commission, we find an openness to the Petrine ministry. Here too the obstacle does not seem to be the ministry of the Bishop of Rome itself, but primarily its exercise. A great moment in the relations between the Lutherans and Catholics came undoubtedly in 1998, when agreement was reached

34. Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on 'Ways to Community', 1980, no. 22-23, in: *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 218.

35. Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on 'The Ministry in the Church', 1981, no. 3, in: *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 248.

36. *Idem*, no. 67-73, *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 269-271.

on 'Justification by Faith', for centuries one of the main issues of disagreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches now united in the World Lutheran Federation. Historically Luther's stand regarding the relation between faith and good works was the direct occasion for his revolt against Rome; this ultimately led to his excommunication and the Reformation.

The present joint declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations³⁷.

"Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works"³⁸.

World Methodist Council and Roman Catholic Church

The Joint Commission of representatives of the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church initially hardly took up the role of the papacy and ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome. However, the Denver Report (1971) mentions in its section on authority.

Only an authority given in love and received in love expresses the deepest meaning of the word for Christians. By comparison all uses of the word in terms of the rule of the Gentiles, of juridical and political usage, are beside the point. Here Methodists would say that half-a-dozen John XXIIIs and Paul VIs in the next century would do more than anything to dispose of a thousand years of conflict and misunderstanding³⁹.

The Honolulu Report (1981) is the first document of the Joint Commission which explicitly speaks about papal authority, which 'no less than any other within the Church, is a manifestation of the continuing presence of the Spirit of Love in the Church or it is nothing'⁴⁰. It then notes in the next paragraph that this primary aspect ('manifestation of the Spirit of love') has been obscured by the emotions and polemics on infallibility, universal and immediate jurisdiction, etc.

37. Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, no.5, *Origins* 28/8 (15 July, 1998) 120.

38. *Idem*, no. 15, p.122.

39. Denver Report, 1971, no. 106, *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 333.

40. Honolulu Report, 1981, no.35, *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 377.

Often these terms were explained without reference to their historical and cultural context. Vatican II adjusted to some extent the imbalance of Vatican I. These emotionally charged terms

are to be understood in the light of the total conception and the total responsibility of teaching and disciplinary office in the Church --- a pastoral office mirroring the constant presence and solicitude of the Spirit within the Church, leading into truth and disciplining in love. Thus, and thus only, whatever its forms and nomenclature, can any authority be understood and legitimized. However the claims implied in such terms are circumscribed and clarified, it is unlikely that Methodists in the foreseeable future will feel comfortable with them. But Methodist awareness of the papacy has enlarged and greatly altered in recent times, and the general idea of a universal service of unity within the Church, a primacy of charity mirroring the presence and work in the Church of the Spirit who is love, may well be a basis for increased understanding and convergence⁴¹.

The Roman Catholic Church especially through representatives from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity or persons appointed by it held also official conversations with leaders from some Pentecostal churches, from the World Alliance of reformed Churches and others. In these conversations the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome did not get much attention. May be the open and strong invitation in *Ut unum sint* may bring about some change in the near future. Much will certainly depend on the progress in the dialogue with the Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist churches.

More important is to indicate some developments in the Roman Catholic Church itself which have a direct or indirect bearing upon the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome.

Symbolic Gestures

At the end of his meeting with Meliton, the metropolitan of Chalcedon and special envoy of Dimitrios I, the ecumenical patriarch of the Orthodox Church, on 14 December, 1975, Paul VI, successor of Peter and the patriarch of the West, suddenly went down on his knees to kiss the feet of the patriarch of East. Though the official Vatican communique called the Pope's action an 'instinctive gesture of brotherhood, reconciliation and peace, I am inclined to agree with Ladislav Orsy, the canon law expert, who reads more in this symbolic gesture: 'It was a magisterial act of teaching. Pope Paul did not seek

41. Honolulu Report, 1981, no. 36, in: *Growth in Agreement*, o.c., 377-378.

the glory of his office; he redefined the practice of papacy. He humbled himself and gave a new turn to the ecumenical movement' ⁴².

At the end of his article he returns to the gesture of Paul VI: 'Giovanni Battista Montini was not given to improvisations. It is much more likely that he carefully planned it, perhaps remembering how much the Lord liked to teach through symbolic actions - did he not wash the feet of his disciples? If this assumption is correct, the Pope did more than to edify the faithful: he was teaching by action. With the authority that he alone possessed, the successor of Peter gave his church a luminous lesson, and to the ecumenical movement a new direction' ⁴³.

How to use 'the keys'?

One of the questions Ladislav Orsy raises in his address to the National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers is:

Should there be in our church a re-evaluation of the use of the power to govern, in particular in the use of the rights within that power, even when those rights are believed to exist 'by divine law?' He distinguishes two questions within this one question:

i. Has the pope the right to appoint bishops to preside over particular churches? We know he has the right to do so. In the course of history he has used that right all over the world. Catholics have hardly questioned the pope's right to do so. But there is a second related question:

ii. He has the right, but does the well-being of the whole church require that he uses this right exclusively all the time? Tradition teaches that throughout the history of the church bishops have been designated or appointed in different ways, by the people, by the bishops of the region, by a diocesan chapter, etc. Whether, when and how the pope uses his right depends on historical contingencies. What is best for the Christian well-being of that particular church, that is, for these disciples of Jesus? What serves the greater good of the whole body? Did the Lord not have rights and powers which he never used? ⁴⁴

Papacy, Synods of Bishops and Bishops' Conferences

It is well-known that during the first decade after Vatican II Pope Paul VI governed in close contact with the College of Bishops; the Roman Curia implemented the vision and policy of the College of Bishops. In the mid-seventies that began to change and the Roman Curia gradually re-gained its share in the governance of the pope. The

42. Ladislav Orsy, S.J., "Kenosis". The Door to Christian Unity', *Origins* 23/3 (3 June, 1993), 38.

43. *Idem*, 41.

44. *Idem*.

Belgian Cardinal Godfried Daneels, a man with vast experience, a wide vision and a regular participant in the synods of bishops, reflects in an interview with the Italian 'Il Regno' on John Paul II's request to dialogue on the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome, the exercise of Petrine office. Papal primacy, he says, should increasingly have consultation with bishops around the world. There should be less centralization and control by the Roman Curia. On important issues the pope should have an international advisory council of six to seven bishops and cardinals at his disposal. This council, with representatives from all over the world, should function as a sounding board for the pope. Because of the rapid and radical changes in modern society, the way in which the pope exercises his ministry of unity will probably have to change in the near future. What cannot be modified, said the cardinal, is the principle that the pope is the successor of Peter and holds primacy in the church.

On important moral, theological and ecclesial issues the pope should often consult the whole episcopal college. The present functioning of the synod of bishops needs to be renewed to foster the collaboration with and participation in the pope's ministry of unity. 'I don't think' said the Cardinal, 'that the pope would be against this. As the synod works now, it is not satisfactory: four weeks of speeches, little possibility of deeper reflection and propositions that are drawn up in one night.' The Belgian prelate was particularly critical of the role of the Roman Curia in the church. It should remain 'an instrument of the pope and nothing else. The Curia cannot be allowed to change from an instrument to a command structure, which assumes part of the pope's authority'. These days the Curia produces too many lengthy documents that are read by too few people. It sends to the bishops' conferences too often questions that require lengthy responses.

However, bishops' conferences should not become so powerful that the universal church is reduced to a collection of national churches. They are instruments that should be tested on their usefulness, but 'I don't see how one can change the autonomy of a diocese, the local church.' At the end of his interview Cardinal touches upon the selection of new bishops. His opinion is that the bishops of a country or region should play a major role in the selection process. Not to listen to the bishops of the region or country has often turned out disastrous⁴⁵.

45. *Origins* 27/3 (5 June, 1997) 35-37; see also: Cardinal John O'Connor, 'Reflections on Church Governance', *Origins* 26/11 (29 August, 1996, 175; Bishop McHugh, 'What is the "New Situation"?', *idem*, 175-176; Archbishop Rembert Weakland, 'The Local Churches and the Church of Rome', *idem*, 176-177; Bishop Donald Wuerl, 'The Backdrop of the Synod for America, *Origins* 27/5 (19 June, 1997, 68-72.

Collegiality

Archbishop John Quinn voices similar insights. Citing his own experience as a close collaborator and advisor of the Pope in the eighties, Quinn searches for the full measure of collegiality. It is more than the collaboration of the bishops in the tasks the pope entrusts to them. When a bishop is ordained, he becomes a member of the college of bishops who together with the pope, the head of the college, share responsibility for the whole church. 'Collegiality does not exist in the fullest sense if bishops are merely passive recipients of papal directives and initiatives. Bishops are not only *sub Petro*. They are also *cum Petro*'⁴⁶.

Cardinal Dialogue!

Cardinal Franz Koenig exercised his responsibility in a courageous and touching manner when he publicly wrote in defence of Fr. Jacques Dupuis. His letter proclaims from the housetops: this is not the way in which the papal ministry of unity should function! With its long-standing, extensive experience over centuries, we should surely be able to rely on the doctrinal congregation to find better ways of doing its job to serve the Church effectively, especially when it is a matter of breaking new ground, as is the case here.⁴⁷ The Cardinal implies, as he will more clearly explain two months later,⁴⁸ that this is a betrayal of the post-Vatican II leadership style. Two months later Cardinal Ratzinger defended the action of the congregation in the same weekly. He stated stressing that it was not the congregation which made the matter public and asserting the congregation's freedom to 'dialogue with any writer'⁴⁹. Cardinal Koenig had written: 'The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith has moved too fast too soon'⁵⁰. Cardinal Ratzinger retorted: 'Perhaps it was not the congregation, but Your Eminence, who, with your article, has written "too fast too soon".'⁵¹

Is the public discussion of two highly respected church giants of Vatican II, not an inspiring example of how bishops celebrate their collegiality and exercise their participation in the church's on-going pilgrimage towards the truth? On 27 March *The Tablet* published Koenig's understanding of the Petrine office. Permit me to quote a few important passages which plead for a different functioning of the Petrine office, a new leadership style of the Bishop of Rome. What

46. *Origins* 26/8 (18 July, 1996, 121).

47. Franz Cardinal Koenig, 'In Defence of Fr. Dupuis', *The Tablet*, 16 January, 1999, 76-77.

48. Franz Cardinal Koenig, 'My vision for the Church of the Future', *The Tablet*, 7 March, 1999, 424-426.

49. 'Cardinal Ratzinger replies', *The Tablet*, 13 March, 1999, 385.

50. Koenig, In defence, a.c., 377.

51. Ratzinger, *The Tablet*, a.c., 385.

the Cardinal proposes is, I am sure, ecumenically much more acceptable. It inspiringly contributes to a response to the Holy Father's invitation to search together with him for a form which makes the ministry of the Bishop of Rome an effective instrument – instead of an obstacle – towards the unity of the church for which the Lord prayed so fervently on the eve of his death.

A gradual decentralisation is needed, so as to strengthen the concern and responsibility of the college of bishops for the whole Church, under and with the Petrine office... At the same time, the competence of individual bishops both locally and regionally needs to be strengthened too, for they are the shepherds of their local Churches, the vicars of Christ in their own dioceses. That is why Vatican II described the Church as a communion of local Churches (Koenig).

Paul VI, the Cardinal writes, wanted to remodel 'the advisory and controlling function of the curial authorities, but the Vatican authorities have succeeded in recapturing their power. The church is now leaving behind its European mould and is gradually becoming a world church.

How to govern a Church of such diversity? We must decentralise. Nowadays the responsibility and concern for the whole Church place increasing demands on the Petrine office. Inevitably the Roman Curia bears part of this burden but this is where the worldwide episcopal college should... (LG 22 and 23) take a hand: 'by Christ's decree and command', each individual bishop 'is obliged to be solicitous for the entire Church'... In fact, however, *de facto* and not *de iure*, intentionally or unintentionally, the curial authorities working in conjunction with the Pope have appropriated the tasks of episcopal college (Koenig).

Cardinal Koenig then returns to the request of the Pope and states that most of the deterrents to other churches can be removed by 'always linking papal primacy to the episcopal college, and thus allaying suspicion that the Petrine office lays absolute supremacy over the Church'. In this context the Cardinal stresses the great importance of the principle of subsidiarity which Pius XII already applied to the government of the church.

Today, however, we have an inflated centralism. The issue is twofold. On the one hand, we have to strengthen the bishops' collegial concern and responsibility for the whole Church in accordance with Vatican II. On the other, we have to cease restricting the competence of local and regional bishops as church leaders. That means, amongst other things, bishops must have a say in episcopal appointments in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity – that nothing be done at a higher level which can be done at a lower⁵².

52. The Cardinal probably emphasizes this because in a number of European

I repeat that it is not a case of seeking to eliminate the pope as the guarantee and symbol of unity... What we have to do, rather, is to discover a new form of government – that is to say, rediscover the old form – which is particularly favourable to ecumenical concerns. Unless the episcopal college is made responsible in conjunction with the Pope, neither the Orthodox nor the Anglicans nor the Protestants will consider any practical steps towards unity⁵³.

Conclusion

The Holy Father's invitation to reflect together with him on a more fruitful way of rendering the ministry entrusted to him as Bishop of Rome was a humble and courageous initiative⁵⁴. Only a more collegial and participative functioning of Jesus' disciples at all levels with the Bishop of Rome as the symbol and bond of their unity can make the church bring about the salvation of all humankind. What about the Vatican's authoritarian steps of the last few years, for example, the 'Reply to the *dubium* concerning the teaching contained in the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith'⁵⁴. 'Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests' Sacred Ministry',⁵⁵ the excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya, the warning against the books of Anthony de Mello, the investigation of Jacques Dupuis' latest book, etc.? The Church, that is we, all of us, is 'at the same time holy and always in need of being purified' (LG 8), also in its structures, particularly in its man-made structures. Only the Spirit can show us the way, the Spirit who manifests himself especially when we listen to one another. John Paul II's invitation is a promising commitment.

It is not difficult to spot an enriching convergence. While the Protestant churches share their heritage of the autonomy of the local churches and the participation and co-responsibility of all the church members in governance, the Roman Catholic Church shows the strength of an episcopal college and the Petrine leadership of the Bishop of Rome.

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Bangalore.

countries bishops have been appointed in spite of strong reservations by bishops of the conference concerned. Many of such appointments have been counterproductive.

53. 'My vision for the Church of the Future, a.c.', 424-426.

54. See p. 1 and reference no. 3.

55. *Origins* 27/24 (27 November 1997) 399-410.

Ecumenical Convergence on Doctrine and Theology of the Eucharist

Errol D'Lima

The convergence reached in relation to the Eucharist by the Ecumenical movement through its various Dialogues and Conferences is the topic discussed in this article. In the concluding remarks the author comments on the following three points: the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist and the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

The Ecumenical movement that tries to bring differing churches into unity has had many manifestations in their histories. This paper examines the progress of such attempts in relation to the Eucharist. Its intention is not to create a false sense of achievement but of showing how reflection on theological questions raised in an ecumenical perspective help a church rediscover a new vitality in her prevailing doctrines. Hopefully, such an effort will help church members join in the process of ecumenical education and formation. The article will have three parts:

- I. The Development of the Ecumenical movement.
- II. The Catholic Response to the BEM statement on the Eucharist.
- III. Concluding Remarks.

I. The Development of the Ecumenical Movement

The very first paragraph of Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism aptly summarized the Council's dismay at the scandal of division present among the followers of Jesus Christ:

...many Christian communions claim to be the true inheritance of Jesus Christ...but they are divided in their convictions and go their different ways, as if Christ himself were divided. Such division is clearly contrary to Christ's will. It is a scandal to the

world and damages the sacred cause of preaching the gospel to every creature.¹

The scandal of division revealed itself in the schisms of the past: the East-West Schism in 1054 when Pope Leo IX excommunicated Michael Cerularius, the patriarch of Constantinople – the latter returning the ‘complement’ – and the Great Western Schism from 1378-1417 when Clement VII was elected anti-pope during Urban VI’s tenure. In the sixteenth century, the Christian Church of the west was divided into Catholic and Protestant. Technically, schism refers to the fact that a particular church is not united to Rome (the papacy), but after Vatican I’s *Pastor Aeternus* affirmed the pope’s universal and immediate jurisdiction over all Christians as of faith, to be in schism would also mean to be heretical! But a series of happenings in the Catholic Church nullified inexplicably the “heretical” connotation. Not only did Vatican II use the term “separated brethren” to describe those of communions other than Catholic, but the historic split between the Eastern Church and Western Catholicism began to be bridged in 1965 when Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenogoras removed the anathemas which had been hurled against each other in 1054.

Some attempts had been made in the past to overcome such schisms. Efforts were made at the Second Council of Lyons (1274), and the Council of Florence (1439) showed how there could be common ground on matters of doctrine and discipline between the Roman Catholic (RC) Church and the Greeks. Yet strenuous efforts to bring together differing groups of believers took shape mainly in the twentieth century. It was a “movement in the Church towards the recovery of the unity of all believers in Christ, transcending differences of creed, ritual and polity”². The need for many Christian bodies to reflect together on their Churches’ mission to the world at large was the occasion for the Edinburgh Conference (1910)³. In 1927, at Lausanne, the first conference of the Ecumenical movement concerning Faith and Order – whose chief object was to bring about Christian reunion – was

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1. Noman P. Tanner, (English Editor): *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume II, Washington, 1990, Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism, no. 1,, p. 908. (DEC)
 2. F.L. Cross And E. .A. Livingstone (Editors): *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford, Third Edition reprinted with corrections, 1997, p. 528. (ODCC)
 3. It was seen as a missionary conference to discuss the way in which Christian mission could be carried out. The conference stressed the ideal of world-evangelization and led to the establishment of the International Missionary Council. It was the forerunner of the Ecumenical Movement.

organized⁴. In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was constituted from two earlier movements: Life and Work, and Faith and Order. In 1961, the constitution of the WCC was amended to read as follows:

A fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit⁵.

Although the RC Church was not – and is not – a full member of the WCC, it has appointed accredited observers to the assemblies of the WCC. Further, “since 1965 a Joint Working Group was established between the Vatican and the World Council of Churches to discuss questions of common concern...” and in 1968 the RC Church accepted full membership of the Faith and Order Commission. In that capacity it took part in the production of the 1982 report on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)⁶.

Already in the nineteenth century, Ecumenism had been a preoccupation in the RC Church. The Church Unity Octave (January 18-25) which was observed in the Anglican Communion since 1908 for reunion of their Church with Rome as the central see of Christians was in 1909 blessed by Pope Pius X and Pope Benedict XV extended its observance to the whole RC Church⁷. However, the reaction of Pope Pius XI to the Lausanne Conference in 1927 was decidedly negative. In his encyclical letter *Mortalium Animos* (January 6, 1928) he condemned the efforts put forth by the Ecumenical movement:

It is clear...why this apostolic See has never permitted its subjects to take part in the Congresses of non-Catholics. The union of Christians cannot be fostered otherwise than by promoting the return of the dissidents to the one true Church of Christ, which in the past they so unfortunately abandoned;

4. “It aimed at promoting doctrinal unity among the diverse branches of Christianity, about 90 different Churches being represented... Great differences became apparent especially as regards the doctrine of the Sacraments, of which the Orthodox recognized seven and the Quakers none. The difficulties were emphasized by the Greek Arp. Germanos, who declared a union impossible without the acceptance of the Seven Oecumenical Councils. None the less, the Conference did much to stimulate interest in reunion and to encourage theological co-operation”. ODCC, p. 958-9.

5. ODCC, p. 1765.

6. The information in this paragraph is from ODCC, p. 1765.

7. ODCC, p. 352 and Richard McBrien (Editor): *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, New York, 1995, p. 317.

return, we say, to the one true Church of Christ which is plainly visible to all and which by the will of her Founder forever remains what he himself destined her to be for the common salvation of human beings⁸.

During the time of Pope Pius XII however, the Church abandoned her negative stance on ecumenism. The Holy Office issued an Instruction *Ecclesia Catholica* (December 20, 1949) that spoke positively about ecumenical dialogue even though it avoided endorsing Catholic participation in ecumenical conferences. With the decision to hold Vatican II, the Catholic Church entered into a new era. Pope John XXIII wished Vatican II to have an ecumenical orientation and in 1960 the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (PCU) was created. Non-Catholic observers were invited to attend Vatican II and they accepted. Finally, the Vatican II decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964) on Ecumenism affirmed the basic and positive stance of the Catholic Church towards the ecumenical movement. In no. 3, the document says the following:

...large communities came to be separated from the full communion of the Catholic Church – for which, often enough, people of both sides were to blame. Those who are now born into these communities and who are brought up in the faith of Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church looks upon them as sisters and brothers, with respect and love. For those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptised are in some kind of communion with the Catholic church, even though this communion is imperfect⁹.

Through *UR*, the Catholic Church affirmed the wholesome status of the Ecumenical movement and indicated how Catholics should conduct themselves in the changed scenario. Without compromising the purity of Catholic doctrine, Catholics were exhorted to pray and work with their “separated brethren”.

Furthermore, in ecumenical dialogue, when catholic theologians join with other Christians in common study of the divine mysteries, while standing fast by the teaching of the church, they should pursue the work with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in catholic doctrine there exists an order or “hierarchy” of truths, since they vary in their connection

8. Refer Jacques Dupuis (Editor): *The Christian Faith* (J. Neuner -J. Dupuils) in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, sixth revised and enlarged edition, Bangalore, 1996, p. 342. (ND 907)

9. DEC, Decree on Ecumenism, no. 3.

with the foundation of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened for this kind of friendly emulation to incite all to a deeper awareness and a clearer manifestation of the unfathomable riches of Christ." (*UR*, no. 11)

On June 1, 1972, the Secretariat for *PCU* felt the need to state the theological reason for admitting Christians of other Churches to the Eucharist:

1. ...the celebration of the Eucharist signifies the fulness of profession of faith and the fulness of ecclesial communion. This principle must not be obscured and must remain our guide in this field.

2. The principle will not be obscured if admission to Catholic Eucharistic communion is confined to particular cases of those Christians who have a faith in the sacrament in conformity with that of the Church, who experience a serious spiritual need for the Eucharistic sustenance, who for a prolonged period are unable to have recourse to a minister of their own community, and who ask for the sacrament of their own accord; all this provided that they have proper dispositions and lead lives worthy of a Christian. (*ND* 915)

The stage was now set for the Lima document (1982) that embodied a major statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM). The document "contains not only important ecumenical advances in theological reflection, it also makes very concrete proposals about the liturgical celebrations of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ordination"¹⁰. A passage in the preface of the BEM publication (Faith and Order Paper No. 111) put out by the WCC, Geneva, captures the importance of the statement on BEM:

Those who know how widely the churches have differed in doctrine and practice on baptism, Eucharist and ministry, will appreciate the importance of the large measure of agreement registered here. Virtually all the confessional traditions are included in the Commission's membership. That theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about baptism, Eucharist and ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the Commission also includes among its full members theologians of the Roman Catholic and other churches which do not belong to the World Council of Churches itself¹¹.

10. Refer Peter E. Fink (Editor): *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, Collegeville (Minnesota), 1990, p. 389. (NDSW)

11. Refer *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 2 nd printing, Geneva, 1982, p. ix.

On p. x, the BEM preface "respectfully invites all churches to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority..." As requested by the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC the official response was to be made to the following three questions:

- the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages;
- the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith;
- the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness;...¹²

The responses were collected in six volumes entitled "Churches respond to BEM" which were edited by Max Thurian¹³. Volume VI contains the RC official response to the BEM.

II. The Catholic Response to the BEM Statement on the Eucharist

The responses that were received from episcopal conferences and Catholic theological faculties were collated by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and sent to the Faith and Order Secretariat in Geneva, in August 1987. In this section, a summary report of these responses concerning the Eucharist in the main will be presented and on occasion a comment will be appended.

Adverting to the fact that 12 of the Faith and Order Commission that prepared BEM were Catholic – one tenth of the 120 members – the Secretariat observed that on key matters of faith, those who before were in confrontation and disagreement with one another now claimed both agreement and convergence. Further, the Secretariat recognized the BEM document both as working towards the goal of unity in faith and at the same time challenging the churches and communities to respond, thus setting off a process of "reception". While noting that the BEM does not reflect full consensus, the Secretariat sees the BEM text as a halfway house through which the churches will have to pass if they continue to seek visible unity:

The text does not offer a full systematic treatment of baptism, Eucharist, or ministry, but focuses rather on those aspects which have been related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity. It is also formulated with the help of a new

12. Italicized in the original.

13. Copyright 1986, WCC, Geneva. The sixth volume was published in 1988. (CBEM)

theological vocabulary which necessarily includes a new horizon of thought. At important junctions of the document, contrasting statements and language open the way to a variety of interpretations¹⁴.

The Secretariat then goes on to express its conviction "that the study of ecclesiology must come more and more into the centre of the ecumenical dialogue" and states that "the fundamental Catholic doctrine that the church of Christ 'subsists in the Catholic Church' can be truly understood only in the framework of a Roman Catholic ecclesiology of communion"¹⁵.

With regard to the Eucharist, the Secretariat begins by enumerating the positive aspects found in the BEM¹⁶. Scripture and Tradition are the sources (not excluding the classical liturgies of the first millennium and patristic theology) used to interpret the Eucharist. The Christological dimension is noted for its "identifying the mystery of the Eucharist in various ways with the real presence of the risen Lord and his sacrifice on the cross." Along with the Trinitarian dimension,

"the content of the act of the church in the Eucharistic prayer includes basic elements required by Catholic teaching as well: thanksgiving to the Father, memorial of the institution of the Eucharist and the sacrifice of the cross; intercession made in union with Christ for the world; petition for the Spirit's coming on the bread and wine and on the community, in order that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, and that the community be sanctified; the meal of the New Covenant"¹⁷.

There is also appreciation for the stress laid on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist and the fact that it "is presented as the central act of the church's worship"¹⁸. More specifically, the Secretariat notes that the BEM's understanding of the Eucharist as "a gift from the Lord", as also "a sacramental meal" that is given to the church as a means "to remember and encounter him" and as "a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ" is also the understanding of the Eucharist that is found in the teaching of the Catholic Church.

At times, when assessing the meaning of the Eucharist in the BEM, the Secretariat expresses some of its unmet expectations. When BEM speaks about the Eucharist as "gift of salvation", it suggests that "since the gift is himself [Jesus Christ], the unambiguous

14. CBEM, p.4.

15. CBEM, p.5.

16. In this section, when references are given to numbers of BEM, they must be understood as referring to the BEM document on the Eucharist alone.

17. CBEM, p. 16-17.

18. CBEM, p. 17.

biblical language, which speaks of participation of the body and blood of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16; John 6: 52-56) should be used..."¹⁹ It also felt that in the Catholic Church's theology, the link between the Eucharist and the forgiveness of sins is sustained because of an ecclesiology that includes (prior) sacramental forgiveness of sins in the church. The notion of thanksgiving to the Father that the BEM states is commended by the Secretariat's response. Particularly praiseworthy is the notion of the "Eucharist as *anamnesis* or memorial of Christ." The Secretariat notes that "*anamnesis* is used to express the idea of the effective, operative presence of the sacrifice of the cross in and through the Eucharistic celebration, for the benefit 'of all humankind'".²⁰

The Secretariat sees the ecclesiological dimension of the Eucharistic doctrine asserted in the BEM text's theology of intercession. It understands the BEM's statement implying "an understanding of the mystery of church and Eucharist which corresponds to the traditional Eucharistic ecclesiology of the Catholic Church"²¹. However, the meaning of intercession as used in the BEM is deemed insufficient

to explain the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist in the Catholic sense... it does not seem to do justice to the reality of Christ's sacrifice to describe the continuity of Christ's saving work only in terms of simple "intercession."

Correspondingly, the description of the church's activity in the Eucharist as thanksgiving and intercession needs to be filled out by some reference to the self-offering of the participants of the Eucharist, made in union with the eternal "self-offering" of Christ²².

Of special satisfaction to the Catholic Church is the statement of the reciprocal link between the word of God and the Eucharist: "The celebration of the Eucharist properly includes the proclamation of the word"(BEM 12). Also acceptable is the text of the real presence of Christ (BEM 13) if "it could be interpreted in the light of the implications of the theology of the *epiklesis* of the Spirit, as found in patristic teaching"²³ On the subject of belief in the real presence of Christ, the Secretariat notes that the *conversion* of the bread and wine into the presence of Christ is of faith, but that new theological explanations as to the 'how' of this change can still be attempted.

It is not as though the BEM has canonized the main dogmatic points that the Catholic Church holds. But the BEM has drawn attention to the implications that a particular church would have to wrestle with

19. CBEM, pp. 17-18

21. CBEM, p. 20

20. CBEM, p. 19.

22. Ibid.

23. CBEM, p. 21

if the word of God – its prophetic address and power to transform – were to be understood and accepted in all its dimensions. In addition, the context of the word of God obliges a church to become more aware of its ecclesiological dimension so that the matter of sacramentality is of a piece with God's word and not an ecclesial accretion! Many of the responses of the churches show that they realize the importance and significance of the ecclesiological dimension underlined in the BEM even though they may not necessarily agree with the view of it expressed in the document. But the BEM also reflects the new theological thinking that has taken place in the Catholic Church (that Vatican II had already foreshadowed) and continues to be manifest in her ongoing theologizing. We shall address ourselves to some of these matters in the concluding remarks.

III. Concluding Remarks

In this concluding section, key points in Catholic Eucharistic theology that have given rise to conflict – not to say hostility – between the Catholics and the Protestants will be taken up and commented on. The key points are (1) the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the Eucharist, (2) the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, and (3) the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

(1) The Proclamation of Word and the Celebration of the Eucharist

The canon of the Scripture and its meaning as word of God became significant in a community of Christian believers. The proclamation of the word, insisted on by our separated brethren since Reformation times, correctly underlines God's initiative in humankind's salvation. At the same time, the need of this word to be historical obliges the churches to explore the understanding of ecclesiology and sacramentality that the Catholic Church has always stressed. In Vatican II, the Catholic Church effectively gave prominence to the word of God in its worship and sacraments (SC 24). The celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments would profit immensely from the word of God proclaimed by the community as a whole, i.e., reflecting on it, praying through it and making it the norm of their day to day life. Such a celebration would surely be a goal foreseen by the Liturgical Movement that sought to restore the active participation of the people in the official worship of the Church. The Catholic Church has learnt much from and has profited greatly by the Protestant insistence on the free and sovereign initiative of God's power in his word. In *DV 21*, the Catholic Church affirms the same reverence to the "divine scriptures" as it does to the Lord's body. In the words of Karl Rahner: "...we can say that the Eucharist is simply the word of God in the Church which

supports and conveys all other words, which forms the centre whence all the reality of the Church derives its meaning"²⁴. The Latin Church's form of sacramental celebration (with its juridical bent) tends more easily to focus attention on the minister as the initiator of the sacramental action. The *epiklesis* aspect should be stressed with the understanding that it is the Spirit of the Lord making his Word effective in the Church!

(2) The Sacrificial Nature of the Eucharist

Although it was at Trent that the Eucharist (Mass) was defined as "a true and proper sacrifice" (ND 1555), the Council made no attempt to define the nature of sacrifice as such. In their attempts to remain to the defined doctrine of Trent and retain the unique sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, theologians – especially in the twentieth century, e.g. M. de la Taille, A. Vonier – have helped clarify the understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Today, we could say that "the giving over of oneself to the other (God)" forms the essence of sacrifice. This took place in the case of Jesus *once and for all*. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus' sacrifice is effectively memorialized through the Church again and again. Here, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission also stressed the "notion of anamnesis, understood as 'the making effective in the present of an event in the past'. The Eucharist is thus presented as 'a means through which the atoning work of Christ on the cross is proclaimed and made effective in the Church'"²⁵. In addition ecumenical concerns about the orthodox sense of the Eucharistic sacrifice is well brought out in the following passage:

What was for the Fathers the absolutely central reality that Christ is the principal agent in the Eucharistic sacrifice which is not a repetition but a representation... of his all-sufficient offering at the Last Supper and on Calvary became increasingly obscured by the horrendous conception that the priest is the principal agent offering this sacrifice *in persona Christi*. This misconception wreaks its havoc even to this day, with many priests unable to resist acting out (as if they were Christ) the words of the institution instead of properly proclaiming them as an integral part of the Eucharistic prayer²⁶.

24. Karl Rahner: *Theological Investigations*, Volume IV, (translated by Kevin Smyth), The Seabury Press, New York, 1974, p. 282.

25. ODCC, p. 568.

26. Robert J. Daly: "Sacrifice" in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* edited by Peter E. Fink, Minnesota, 1990, p. 1137. Refer also Robert J. Daly's article on "Sacrifice" in *The New Dictionary of Theology* edited by Joseph A.

(3) The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist

In the Catholic Church's doctrine of the Real Presence, a key element of Eucharistic faith was expressed. In affirming this expression, the Eastern, Western, Lutheran (at least in *usu*) and Anglican Churches have no difference. But affirming the Real Presence in faith needed more than a mere reference to substance and accidents, — terminology that characterized theological explanations of yesteryears. Already, Edward Schillebeeckx had made a seminal contribution to sacramental theology by bringing into it notions from phenomenology. This was especially helpful in understanding the term "transubstantiation"²⁷. While taking his cue from the Emmaus episode in Luke 24:13-35, Peter E. Fink examines the doctrine of the Real Presence and shows how each of four dynamic signifiers (the 'presider', the word of God, the assembly and the bread and wine) enables the believer to experience the mystery of Jesus Christ present in the Eucharistic action²⁸. Fink correctly says:

the confession of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is finally, not a statement of "fact" to be proven, but the announcement of a "person" to be met²⁹.

The questions raised by Churches that differed with the Catholic Church on matters of doctrine have been presented in an ecumenical perspective. Within such a perspective it is possible to deal with such questions without the stress of Reformation prejudices and petty misunderstandings. In the case of the Eucharist, it has been ecumenical efforts that have brought newness of insight into the notion of sacrifice, an appreciation for the churches that proclaim the word of God even as they celebrate the Lord's Supper, and an understanding that fosters true Eucharistic hospitality.

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Komonchalk, Mary Collins and Dermont A. Lane, Minnesota, 1987, pp. 923-25. Also Robert J. Daly: *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, Philadelphia, 1978.

27. Edward Schillebeeckx: *The Eucharist* (translate by N.D. Smith), New York, 1968, pp. 131-144.

28. Peter E. Fink: "Perceiving the Presence of Christ" in *Worship* (58), 1984, pp. 17-28.

29. NDSW, p. 443.

An Ecumenical Approach to Scripture and Tradition and Biblical Hermeneutics

Jacob Parappally

The author presents the various efforts made by both Catholics and Protestants in understanding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in the context of ecumenism and the way this understanding has affected the interpretation of the Scripture. The ecumenical dialogues among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches brought about great agreement among the Churches on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition - on their organic unity, on the recognition of the Scripture as a constituent part of the living Tradition, on the unique place and role of the Scripture in the Church and on the acceptance of the historico-critical method of exegesis. The achievement of the Churches in the field reveals the active presence of the Spirit and engenders hope for the future.

Scripture unites Christians. But their traditions divide. In fact, one of the most important causes of the Reformation was the tragic misunderstanding of the relation between Scripture and Tradition. It is a paradox that the followers of the one who lived in authentic communion with all that exists, prayed for unity among his disciples and gave up his life that humans may have a life of communion with God and with one another, succumbed easily to the temptations of division and disunity.

The divisions in the Church were not caused by some linguistic problems in the formulation of important Christian doctrines, though the history of the doctrinal controversies gives some examples of such debatable doctrinal formulations. Lack of openness to search for the truth that sets everyone free, unwillingness to respect the point of view of the opponents, political interests, prejudices, arrogance etc., contributed to the divisions in the Church. This is true also of the classical question of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition raised at the time of Reformation. Due to various historical reasons Tradition seemed to mean the teaching office or *magisterium* of the

Church which was centralized in the Pope; the Reformers affirmed that many medieval traditions were not of apostolic origin which alone guaranteed authenticity. The strong opposition to traditions which they considered to be incompatible with the teaching of the Scripture was crystalized in their emphatic affirmation "Scripture alone". Making a dualism between Scripture and Tradition and rejecting the latter and thus questioning its normative character were not a mere matter of theological questions alone. Today both Catholics and Protestants admit that the questions raised by the Reformers as well as the defensive posture taken by the Counter-Reformers are to be seen not only from the point of view of faith and doctrines but also from the complex interplay of other interests such as political, social, economic and religious power structures. The actors in this tragedy of division were victims of their own times but what they bequeathed to the later generations cut the roots of Christian fellowship and communion for more than four centuries, and fostered deep rooted prejudices, hatred and even fratricidal wars. What suffered in the end was a united witness to the forgiving love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, establishing his Kingdom and thus fulfilling his mission with the assistance of his Spirit.

Thanks to the openness of the Churches to renewal, self-criticism and re-dedication to the cause of Christ and his mission, there is a growing interest to search for what unites the Churches more than what divides them. There is also the willingness to shed prejudices, clear misunderstandings, revoke condemnations and enter into dialogue to reach agreement on doctrinal matters. The ecumenical movement among the churches encouraged and supported by the Second Vatican Council and the recent Popes and the World Council of Churches through its the Faith and Order Commission have come a long way in clarifying their respective doctrinal positions and coming into certain agreement on many important doctrinal issues that divide the Churches. The understanding of the relation between Scripture and Tradition is one among those doctrinal issues. Related to the understanding of Scripture and Tradition is also biblical hermeneutics which contributed much to the clarification of the questions raised with regard to both Scripture and Tradition.

In the following pages an attempt is made to present the efforts made by both Catholics and Protestants in understanding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition anew in the context of ecumenism, and how this understanding affected their interpretation of the Scripture.

1. The Meaning of Tradition in Relation to Scripture

The Latin word *traditio* comes from the verb *tradere* which means

to hand over, to deliver or to surrender something to someone. Originally it was a legal term of transferring ownership to someone. The Greek term *paradonai* has the same meaning. When a material thing is transferred the giver loses the ownership. However, when spiritual riches or teachings of a master are transmitted to another, the giver does not lose them¹. Therefore, the term tradition has a richer and deeper meaning in theology than in secular contexts.

It is, indeed, real tradition or true surrender of God when he revealed himself in creation, in the history of humans, in and through his chosen people and finally through his Son whom the Father 'gives up for us' (Rom 8:31-32). It is the same tradition that the Son continued when he "gave himself up for us" (Gal 2:20) and gave his Spirit to his apostles to continue the divine tradition in and through the Church till the end of time. Clement of Rome says: "The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ, therefore, is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both of these are orderly arrangements, then, by God's will"². Like Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Serapion of Antioch and Tertullian considered tradition as the transmission of the divine plan of salvation in descending order, finally reaching the Church which preserves it and proclaims it. In this sense tradition is a mystery in which we are involved in such a way that it cannot be easily articulated but only lived. It is lived in history and in the community and in one's own context, but at the same time it also transcends history.

In the strict sense the term tradition includes everything that makes God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ effective in the Church through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Congar says: "Indeed, if 'tradition' is taken in its basic, strict sense, signifying transmission or delivery, it includes the *whole* communication, excluding nothing. If, then, we consider the *content* of what is offered, tradition comprises equally holy Scriptures and, besides these, not only doctrines but things: the sacraments, ecclesiastical institutions, the powers of the ministry, customs and liturgical rites, in fact, all the Christian realities themselves"³. The transcendent subject of this tradition, according to Congar, is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given to the Church, that it may bear witness to the Gospel to the ends of the earth and to the end of time (Acts 1:8). Irenaeus affirms this when he says: "The preaching of the Church truly continues without change and is everywhere the same, and has

1. Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and the Life of the Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1964), p. 16.

2. Clement of Rome, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 42, 1-2. William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1970), p. 10.

3. Yves M.-J. Congar, pp. 17-18.

the testimony of the Prophets and the Apostles and all their disciples ... That in which we have faith is a firm system directed to the salvation of men; and, since it has been received by the Church, we guard it . Constantly it has its youth renewed by the Spirit of God, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel; and it causes the vessel containing it also to be rejuvenated."⁴ Based on the faith-affirmation that the Holy Spirit is 'the operating principle of the Church as well as its principle of identity', the Council of Trent justified the value of Tradition against the rejection of it by the Reformers. Further, it is the Church, the community of the faithful, the body of Christ, which is the visible and historical subject of Tradition. Congar says, "All Christians are collectively responsible for Christianity, just as collectively, they all form a holy priesthood and spiritual fabric (cf. 1 Pet 2.5-10). They carry and transmit Christianity and the Gospel from generation to generation. Within the body of Christians, that is the Church, the hierarchy, following the apostles, have received the mandate, authority and corresponding power to keep the apostolic deposit and Gospel and to explain them authentically ... Collectively and organically the faithful and hierarchy form the subject of Tradition"⁵.

The transmission of the Gospel is the responsibility of all Christians. To preserve, judge and define it with authority is the function of the Magisterium, the college of bishops united with the Pope, who is the head of this college. Thus the magisterial function exercised by the hierarchy is to be seen as the commitment of the Church to preserve and transmit the apostolic heritage to fulfill the mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

In the Council of Trent for the first time the teaching authority of the Church, conscious of its responsibility to preserve, judge and define the Tradition, solemnly declared what the Church meant by Tradition itself. In its fourth session in 1546, the Council affirmed that the Gospel contained the saving truths and morals promulgated by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the apostles to be preached to all. "The Council clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, having received by the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and have been transmitted as it were from hand to hand"⁶. The relation between Scripture and Tradition in this Council document was a matter of theological debate. Did the Council affirm that these were two independent sources of revelation? Though Canisius and Bellarmine answered positively to this question it did not seem to be the correct

4. *Adversus Haereses*, 3, 24, 1.

5. Yves. M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Life of the Church*, p.62

6. Neuner J, Dupuis J, *The Christian Faith* (Bangalore: TPI, 1992), p. 77, ND 210.

understanding of the mind of the Council. Later theologians like J.A.Moehler (d. 1838), the Tuebingen school of theology and J. Henry Newman (d.1890) opposed such an interpretation of the Council's statement and affirmed that Scripture and Tradition were not two separate sources of revelation but the dimensions of the one living Tradition, the Church itself. This living Tradition, the Church must be seen as the divine reality in history which included the totality of Christian life and thinking organically developed through the inspiration and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. According to Newman the Protestant principle *sola Scriptura* would lead to radical subjectivism. Scripture always needed interpretation by the Church and the whole history of the Church could be seen as the development of the Bible through its interpretation in dogmas and doctrines. Thus the Church provided for the development of faith through the guidance of the Spirit.

In the 19th century John Baptist Franzelin held that tradition precedes Scripture in the order of time, logic, cognition, comprehension and amplitude. Tradition contained the doctrine of Scripture and about Scripture⁷. For M.J.Sheeben both Scripture and Tradition have an organic relationship. However, there is a relative sufficiency of Scripture. The oral deposit of faith in the tradition is the living commentary of the truths in the written deposit. So all the revealed truths are somehow related to Scripture. However tradition can go beyond the Scripture as in the case of the fixing of the canon of the Scripture and defining as dogma the perpetual virginity of Mary etc. Thus Sheeben attempted at a synthesis of the earlier views on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

The Second Vatican Council looked at the question of the relation between Scripture and Tradition influenced by the theological discussion that preceded the Council. The first draft of the document on Divine Revelation presented Scripture and Tradition as two sources of Revelation. This was rejected. The final document did not consider Scripture and Tradition as separate sources of revelation but affirmed their inner unity as they flowed from the same divine well-spring. (DV. 9) The Council overcame the question of the two sources of revelation by recognizing Scripture and Tradition as two functions within the living historical transmission of truth. It did not state that the Scripture was insufficient in communicating everything that pertains to faith but affirmed that the Church did not derive the certainty about the whole content of revelation from Scripture alone. The ecumenical question about the material sufficiency of Scripture was, thus, avoided but it

7. Cyprian Illickamury, "The Relation between Scripture and Tradition" in *Emerging India and the Word of God*, ed. Paul Puthanangady, (Bangalore:NBCLC, 1991), p. 402

was clearly stated that Tradition included everything which contributed to the holiness of life and the increase in faith of the people of God. This Tradition, according to the Council, was the constant continuation of the being and faith of the Church. The question, whether in the organic and dynamic understanding of Tradition there could only be progress in the life and practice of the Church or could there be also aberrations and regressions, was raised by Cardinal Mayer of America but was not considered. It would have been of great importance for ecumenical dialogue if this question were to be taken up and if Scripture were to be seen as a norm for judging the dynamic growth of tradition⁸.

2. Scripture and Tradition in the Understanding of the WCC

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in its attempt to reach agreement on various doctrinal and theological issues that divide the Churches, studied the question of Tradition and the relation between Scripture and Tradition along with other important issues. The reports prepared by different groups appointed by the Commission revealed the desire of the Commission to look at the question historically and objectively. A report on 'Tradition' prepared by a group of theologians who studied the subject for about ten years prior to the Montreal Conference of 1963 determined the final Report of the Conference itself regarding the relation between Tradition and Scripture. This Report explained that the Church as a living tradition because it receives something, believes in it and hands over the same to the next generation. What is to be handed over is what is given by God, namely, the different elements of the Church: "The proclamation of the Gospel, Baptism, Eucharist, Holy Scripture, creeds, the ministry in different forms, the different charismatic gifts... They are all, each in its place, signs and bearers of the one Tradition"⁹. God is the active agent in handing down the Tradition in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, the same God hands over himself in and through his Son Jesus Christ. The content of this *paradosis* or Tradition, Jesus Christ is mediated to us through "the apostolic testimony" in the canonical scriptures and by the continuing action of the Holy Spirit in the people of God through all the visible elements of the Church"¹⁰.

The report arrived at a happy synthesis in the understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition overcoming the one-sided emphasis of either of them which divided the Churches since the

8. Cyprian Illickamury, "The Relation between Scripture and Tradition", p.406.

9. K.E.Skydsgaard, "Tradition," *Faith and Order Findings: The Report to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. Paul S. Minear, (London: SCM Press, 1963), FPO No.40, p. 36

10. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Reformation. It traced the evolution of the understanding of Tradition from an ecumenical point of view. It showed convincingly that Luther and the Reformers were not against Tradition in the strict sense but was against *traditions* by which they meant *Menschensatzungen*, prescribed laws and regulations about Christian life and worship, imposed by the pope and the hierarchy as a whole. They might have been useful but Luther found them oppressive and dehumanizing. He recognized the traditions of the first centuries and the first four Ecumenical Councils as normative for the Church of later times as they were explanations of Scripture. Writing to Count Albert of Brandenburg in 1535, Luther affirmed, "It is a perilous and dreadful thing to hear or to believe something which is contrary to the unanimous testimony, faith and teaching of the Holy Christian Church, which has been unanimously held from the beginning throughout the world for over fifteen hundred years"¹¹. Luther affirmed that the Church existed before the Scripture and the Gospel or the living Word of God existed before the Church which it proclaimed and handed down before writing down as Scripture. He admitted that the Church was a historical reality and it evolved its own traditions. Some of them did not seem to proceed neither from Scripture nor from authentic living Tradition and were judged by the Reformers as false oppressive. So the traditions of the Church must submit themselves to the rule of the living Word of God. Luther's problem was not with the authentic Tradition of the Church but with those traditions which he found oppressive. In his zeal to affirm the authentic Tradition he rejected those traditions which he thought to be false. The classical expression of such rejection of traditions ended in the affirmation *sola Scriptura* which was interpreted by both Catholics and Protestants as the rejection of Tradition. In response to Luther when Trent affirmed Scripture and Tradition as the two sources of revelation, the Lutheran theology of the seventeenth century rejected Tradition completely seeing it as opposed to Scripture. Tradition was seen by Puritan Protestantism as traditionalism which destroyed individual freedom.

From Luther's insistence on sound Tradition implicit in the battle cry of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura* to orthodox Lutheranism's complete rejection of Tradition there was a progressive devaluation of Tradition. But the progress of the critical study and interpretation of Scripture in the twentieth century challenged both Protestants and Catholics to shed most of their prejudices against the theological positions of each other and become more self-critical about their own established positions concerning the role of Scripture and Tradition in their life. During the years preceding the Montreal Conference of the

11. K.E. Skydsgaard, "Tradition", p. 36

Faith and Order Commission of 1963, different groups belonging to various member churches of the WCC from all the continents reviewed the question of the relation between Scripture and of Tradition. They also entered into dialogue with Catholic theologians like Yves M.-J. Congar. One of the sub-sections which studied the question, 'the Role of Scripture in the Traditionary Process' in detail presented its first draft with a radical change in the Protestant understanding of Tradition. It said:

In our present situation, we wish to consider the problem of Scripture and Tradition, or rather that of Tradition and Scripture. Our starting-point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and we are all indebted to that tradition, inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians *sola traditione*, by tradition alone. Tradition then in this sense includes the preaching of the Word and worship, Christian teaching and theology, missions and also witness to Christ in the lives of the members of the Church¹².

This was a revolutionary statement. It overcame the unnecessary and unwarranted dichotomy between Scripture and Tradition. The phrase '*sola traditione*' would have been of real value for the furthering of ecumenism between Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Churches had it not been abandoned as a 'dangerous' phrase when the final version of the Report was formulated. During the discussion that led to the rejection of the phrase it was pointed out that though what was meant by the phrase was acceptable the phrase itself would lead to more misunderstanding among the Protestants who were used to the battle cry of the Reformation *sola Scriptura*, and were suspicious of the W.C.C. David M. Paton who kept 'a Montreal Diary' says that even though the phrase *sola traditione* was abandoned, "it would probably live on, not less powerful for being unofficial"¹³. A radical departure from the traditional Protestant attitude towards Tradition was a hopeful sign for dialogue between Protestants and Catholics furthering ecumenism. This new understanding of Tradition and its relation to Scripture was clearly spelt out in the final report of the Montreal Conference.

One of the major achievements of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Montreal in 1963 with regard to the question of

12. *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, eds. P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, (London: SCM Press, 1964), p.24.

13. *Ibid.*, p.25.

Scripture and Tradition was to clarify the meaning of the terms used as well as their content. Such clarifications are absolutely necessary for any fruitful dialogue with regard to controversial matters. Section II of the report of the Montreal Conference distinguished different meanings of the word *tradition*. "We speak of *Tradition* (with capital T), *tradition* (with small t) and *traditions*. By the *Tradition* is meant the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church, Christ himself present in the life of the Church. By *tradition* is meant the traditionary process. The term *traditions* is used in two senses, to indicate both the diversity of forms of expression and also what we call confessional traditions, for instance the Lutheran tradition or the Reformed tradition"¹⁴. After clarifying the terminologies the report acknowledged the fact that Tradition precedes the Scriptures and points to the significance of tradition or the process of transmission. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the oral and written traditions of the prophets and apostles led to the formation and the canonization of the Scriptures. Further, the Report pointed out that though the early Church did not see any problem with regard to the relationship between Tradition and Scripture it became a matter of controversy in the dialogue between Catholics and Protestants. While the Catholics understood tradition as divine truth not expressed in the Holy Scripture alone, but also orally transmitted, the Protestants held that "the Holy Scripture alone, as the infallible and sufficient authority in all matters pertaining to salvation and to which all human traditions should be subjected"¹⁵. These different positions of the Churches with regard to Scripture and Tradition needed reconsideration in the context of the ecumenical movement which realized that the proclamation of the Gospel was historically conditioned. It recognized also the contemporary Catholic theology of Tradition which enhanced dialogue between Protestants and Catholics. The section report to the Conference had already underscored the development of the theology of Tradition since the Council of Trent and showed the possibility of reaching an understanding between Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics on the issue of the relation between Scripture and Tradition.

The Montreal Conference attempted at a reformulation of the question of the relation between Scripture and Tradition in the context of ecumenical dialogue. It proposed the following statement in its report:

Our starting-point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament,

14. *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, The Report from Montreal 1963, eds. P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, (London: SCM Press, 1964), para 39, p.50.

15. *Ibid.*, para 43, p. 51.

and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christ by the lives of the members of the Church¹⁶.

The Report further emphasised Tradition as the living reality of Christian Faith transmitted through the work of the Holy Spirit and its content was recognized as God's revelation and self-giving of Christ present in the Church. But the question of recognizing authentic Tradition and the clear criterion to judge its authenticity needed to be found. The post-apostolic Church appealed to the Tradition handed down by the apostles when it needed a criterion to judge the deviations from the truth of the Gospel. In the context of the heresies, the canon of the New Testament was defined and recognized by the Church and it became the criterion. The criterion for judging the authenticity of Tradition, according to the Report, is the Holy Scriptures rightly interpreted. It also raised the question 'what is right interpretation'? The Report did not answer this question but enumerated the different hermeneutical principles used by the different churches and affirmed the ecumenical need to arrive at an adequate interpretation of the Scriptures so that the Word of God could address us and the Scripture could be safeguarded from arbitrary exegesis.

The significant contribution of the Montreal Report to the cause of ecumenism was its recognition of the unity of Scripture and Tradition. It took the bold step to overcome the polarisation of Scripture and Tradition and the emphasis on one at the cost of the other. It affirmed that the apostolic tradition is *tradere Christum*, and in this sense there is only *one* Tradition although there are different forms and wordings for it. Commenting on the unity of Scripture and Tradition as recognized by the Report E. Flesseman-van Leer says: "The Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* is qualified by the reminder that the Bible is part of Tradition and embedded in Tradition; in fact it becomes living as it is rightly interpreted in ever new situations. On the other hand, Tradition as source of revelation is qualified by the assertion that it is only accessible in traditions whose trustworthiness must be tested in the light of the Scripture. One of the most far-reaching differences between the 'protestant' and 'catholic' views is being bridged by this double

16. *The Fourth Conference of Faith and Order*, pp. 51-52. Paragraph No.45.

qualification"¹⁷. This was, indeed, a major achievement for the cause of ecumenism. It is said that the Report of the Conference in which for the first time the Orthódox churches fully participated and the representatives of the Catholic church were observers had a certain influence on the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council.

The Montreal Conference raised questions regarding 'right interpretation' of the Scripture as the criterion to judge the authenticity of Tradition. Therefore, the studies on hermeneutics initiated by the Faith and Order Commission following the Montreal Conference hoped that common hermeneutical rules would lead to a common approach to the Bible and thus further the cause of ecumenism.

3. Biblical Hermeneutics in the Context of Ecumenism

The acceptance of the authority of Scripture as the *norma non normanda* for Christian life and proclamation unites all Christian churches of various confessional traditions. However, their approach to the Bible, their understanding of its authority and their interpretations of it differ. Lukas Vischer says: "In particular, they (the churches) assess differently the respective authority and interaction of criteria like the Bible, the creeds and confessional statements, the magisterium and the common mind of the Church. Consequently, though reading the same Bible, the churches can easily arrive at different conclusions. Ultimately, therefore, they can overcome their differences and restore communion only if they succeed in defining together the appropriate approach to Bible"¹⁸. It is imperative for the effectiveness of the Christian witness to the world that the churches adopt an ecumenical approach to the interpretation of the Bible.

The Montreal Conference recognized the role played by the confessional traditions in the interpretation of the Bible. It identified the various hermeneutical keys used by various churches. For some confessional traditions the hermeneutical principle has been to interpret any portion of the Bible in the light of the whole Bible. For some others the interpretation must be based on the central message of the Scripture like incarnation, redemption, the Kingdom of God, the ethical teachings of Jesus, justification etc. In the Orthodox Church the hermeneutical key is to be sought in the mind of the Church as expressed in the Fathers of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils. In the Roman Catholic Church the deposit of faith guarded by the *magisterium* provides the key to biblical interpretation¹⁹. The

17. Ellen Flessman-van Leer, ed., *The Bible: Its Authority and Interpretation in the Ecumenical Movement*, Faith and Order Paper No.99(Geneva: WCC,1983), p.3.

18. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

19. *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order*, p. 53, Paragraph 54.

convergence or the divergence in the interpretation of the Scripture depends on the confessional affiliation of the exegete. The Montreal Conference echoed the concern of all the churches that an adequate interpretation of the Scriptures must be found so that the Word of God could address one and all and the Scripture could be safeguarded from arbitrary and subjective exegesis. The Montreal Conference recommended further study on the problem of biblical hermeneutics.

The Faith and Order meeting at Bristol in 1967 achieved certain consensus on the question of correct exegesis and right interpretation of the Scripture. It explained the methods used in best scholarly exegesis. Since Bible contains a group of literary documents it must be studied using the same methods used for studying literary documents. A biblical text needs to be studied and interpreted taking into consideration the context and the historical process of its articulation. So the Bristol meeting found the historical-critical method necessary for the study and interpretation of the Scripture. It insisted that the earliest text of the Bible must be established carefully and accurately and the text for scholarly study and interpretation must be in the original languages and not their translations. The Bristol meeting recognized also the need of making use of secular scholarship in interpreting the Scripture. The tools of interpreting secular literature as well as philosophical methods of hermeneutics could be of help in the interpretation of the Bible. The study of the Bible is affected by certain previous knowledge and understanding of the Bible and every reading of the text provides an initial understanding of its meaning. "The task of interpretation is to discuss and elaborate this initial understanding and if necessary to correct it, in order that the text itself may speak to us more profoundly"²⁰. One of the main consequences of scholarly exegetical study and interpretation of the Scripture is that it furthers ecumenism. Though the biblical scholars might begin their exegetical work from their confessional standpoints, in the course of their honest investigations they would discover that the character of the Scripture itself demand not just one principle of interpretation but many. This itself would lead to a better understanding among the Christians.

The WCC has realized that the development of hermeneutics has a particular impact on ecumenical movement. The earlier trend was to conceive the Bible as a unity with divine acts of salvation as its centre. It was hoped that a more or less harmonious interpretation of the Bible was possible. But this had to be changed in the context of new exegetical developments. The biblical scholars have drawn attention to the diversity in the Bible and the different interpretations

20. *New Direction in Faith and Order*, Bristol 1967 (Geneva: WCC, 1968), p.37.

of salvation based on the *sitz im leben* or setting in life of the different writings. Some had serious apprehension whether such exegetical developments would undermine the cause of ecumenical movement itself. But the Bristol report found that this development would lead to deeper unity. It stated that the differences among the churches were based more on non-theological issues than hermeneutical differences. To the extent the confessional differences were based on the Scripture the hermeneutical debate brought about the awareness that such differences were already there in the canonical books of the Bible. This would help the churches to understand their divisions as possible and legitimate interpretation of one and same Gospel. The Bristol report recognized the study of the biblical scholars with regard to the understanding of diversity and unity in the Bible as a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement.

The mutual influence and collaboration of the Protestants and the Catholics in the field of biblical research contributed much to the ecumenical understanding between these churches. Since the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pope Pius XII in 1943 recognizing that there are different literary forms in the Bible, there have been much progress in the field of biblical research in the Catholic Church. Under Pope Paul VI the Pontifical Biblical Commission tackled the problem concerning the historical truth of the Gospels. It states that the Gospels are substantially historical but they are not literally historical in every detail and the gospel material passed through stages of development which modified it. Jesus did and said things which were incorporated into the preaching by eyewitnesses and later this preaching became the source for the writers who compiled the Gospels. The Biblical Commission document of 1964 affirmed in a positive way that Gospels are not literal accounts and implicitly it allowed the view of most of the biblical scholars that the evangelists were not eyewitnesses but second generation Christians who drew their knowledge from the apostolic generation. Such developments in the Catholic approach, helped by the church authority, effected an intelligent understanding of the Scriptures. The statements of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1964 guided the document on Divine Revelation of Vatican II²¹. The historical-critical method of exegesis, in spite of certain reservations from certain quarters against its use, is widely used by Catholic biblical scholarship today. This method of biblical exegesis and the interpretation of the Scriptures that follow from it brought together eminent biblical scholars, both Catholics and Protestants to work towards a united and effective Christian witness to the Gospel.

21 Cfr. Raymond E. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985) pp.11-14.

Conclusion

The ecumenical dialogue among the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches on questions that created divisions among the Churches reveals their new openness to the Truth that sets everyone free and their docility to the Spirit of Truth that leads everyone to communion. Readiness to listen to the Spirit who speaks to the Churches led the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches to an agreement on outstanding issues that still hinder the fuller communion among the Churches. The question of the relation between Scripture and Tradition was one among such issues. The Catholic Church in its theological reflection on Scripture and Tradition leading to the document on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council and the Faith and Order Commission of WCC through its various studies and especially through its reports of the Montreal Conference of 1964 and the Bristol meeting of 1967 on the same theme exhibited various points of agreement between Churches on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. The understanding of organic unity of Scripture and Tradition, the recognition of the Scripture as a constituent part of the living Tradition and the unique place and role of the Scripture as *norma non normanda* in the Church are major achievements in this ecumenical endeavour. The confessional differences in the interpretation of the Bible has been overcome to a great extent with the acceptance of historical-critical method of exegesis by the Protestant and the Catholic biblical scholars. There may be still minor irritants that are yet to be removed for a healthy communion among the Churches on this issue of Scripture and Traditions. What the Churches have achieved in the field of ecumenism reveals the presence of the Spirit who is the originator of differences and the inspirer of communion.

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Infant versus Believers' Baptism: Search for an Ecumenical Understanding

J. Jayakiran Sebastian

The paper is mainly concerned with the issue regarding Infant and Adult Baptism and the discussion is mainly based on the BEM document of Faith and Order Commission (paper no. 111), WCC 1982. The author cites the example of the Church of North India which has within its membership those who practise Infant and Adult baptisms. Other connected questions in the Indian context are also briefly discussed. The Rev. Dr. J. Jayakiran Sebastian is a Presbyterian of the Church of South India, and Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Ethics, at the United Theological College, Bangalore.

Introduction

"By the sacrament of baptism a person is truly incorporated into Christ and into his Church and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life. Baptism, therefore, constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn. Baptism, of itself, is the beginning, for it is directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. It is thus ordered to the profession of faith, to the full integration into the economy of salvation, and to Eucharistic communion. Instituted by the Lord himself, baptism, by which one participates in the mystery of his death and resurrection, involves conversion, faith, the remission of sin, and the gift of grace."¹

Although the above statement reflects a carefully reasoned out theological position, and incorporates the concern for unity, in actual fact churches all over the world, including churches in India, continue

1. This is the opening paragraph [92] of Chapter IV: "Communion in Life and Spiritual Activity among the Baptized", Section A: The Sacrament of Baptism, " in *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican City, March 1993), p. 57.

to struggle with the meaning and implications, as well as the practice of baptism².

One of the major questions that continues to dominate discussions on baptism is the question regarding the relationship between the understanding of baptism as the basis for the unity of the church and the reality of the divergences between those churches who hold to the reality of infant baptism and those churches who stress the necessity of believer's baptism. In a fine article analysing various aspects of baptism, Dagmar Heller points out that "[t]he greatest divergence evident in the responses [of the churches to the BEM document³] concerns the question of the practice of infant baptism over against the practice of adult baptism"⁴. With this introduction, let us move on to a consideration of the BEM document and also look back at some of the stages of the ecumenical journey, and also follow some of the post-BEM developments⁵. The specific issue of infant and believers' baptism will also be studied. The article will conclude with some questions related to baptism in the Indian context.

The BEM Document and its Optimism

In 1982, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, following a long and arduous journey, published the document entitled "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry", following a meeting in Lima, Peru, where representatives of "virtually all major church traditions", including "Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, United, Disciples, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal"⁶, reached theological convergence on various issues regarding baptism,

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2. See my article, J. Jayakiran Sebastian, "Baptism and the Unity of the Church in India Today", in Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, eds., *Baptism and the Unity of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), pp. 196-207.
 3. The BEM document: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).
 4. Dagmar Heller, "Baptism - the Basis of Church Unity? The Question of Baptism in Faith and Order", *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 1998, pp. 484.
 5. In analysing this, I have drawn upon the section "Baptism in the Contemporary Ecumenical Discussions", of my earlier work, J. Jayakiran Sebastian, ".... *baptisma unum in sancta ecclesia...*": A Theological Appraisal of the Baptismal Controversy in the Work and Writings of Cyprian of Carthage (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997). [Also published by Verlag an der Lottbek (Peter Jensen), Ammesbek bei Hamburg, 1997].
 6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, [hereafter BEM] back cover.

eucharist and ministry. This major ecumenical document⁷ has, since its adoption, "led to a process of discussion, exchange and response which is of major ecumenical significance"⁸.

The following quotation on baptism from the BEM document, accentuates the longing and illustrates the great desire of the ecumenical movement to move towards convergence in the understandings of the churches with regard to what could be considered some of the basic convictions of Christianity:

Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity.⁹

With regard to baptism, the BEM document itself recognizes in the commentary section that

The inability of the churches mutually to recognize their various practices of baptism as sharing in the one baptism, and their actual dividedness in spite of mutual baptismal recognition, have given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of Church. ... The need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities¹⁰.

Regarding the baptism of believers and infants the hope was expressed in the commentary part that "(t)he differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community"¹¹.

This means that, on the one hand, there was a growing desire to achieve some kind of commonly agreed upon basis on which the churches can faithfully witness; on the other hand, there was a growing frustration with the seeming inability to come to terms with the hope testified to by Jesus "that all may be one" (John 17:21), a hope which

7. A detailed 'critique' of the baptism section in the BEM document, which takes into consideration the thinking of certain bilateral dialogues on the theme of baptism, as well as the baptismal liturgical practises of some churches as examples, is found in Eugene L. Brand, "The Lima Text as a Standard for Current Understandings and Practice of Baptism", *Studia Liturgica*, Vol. 16 (1986), pp. 40-63.

8. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982 - 1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149 (Geneva: WCC Publications, '90), p3

9. BEM, D. 6, p.3,

10. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, *op cit.*, Commentary (6) p. 3.

11. BEM, Commentary (12) p.5.

remained more a dream than a reality¹². This unfulfilled dream, however, did not offer a reason to stagnate in helpless fatalism, but to acknowledge that the aims and activities" of the ecumenical movement included a recognition that

The grace of God has impelled members of many Churches and ecclesial Communities, especially in the course of the present century, to strive to overcome the divisions inherited from the past and to build anew a communion of love by prayer, by repentance and by asking pardon of each other for sins of disunity past and present, by meeting in practical forms of cooperation and in theological dialogue¹³.

It is clear that the BEM document was an attempt to consciously, creatively, sincerely and prayerfully face up to the challenges of the time and to offer to the churches a document, which while not being in a position to satisfy everyone and reflect every shade of opinion, nevertheless, optimistically looked forward to a time of greater ecumenical interaction, moving beyond "the false ecumenical solution of a comfortable denominationalism in which the churches each tend their own gardens, careful not to bother or insult others, but in no way living out or even seeking a truly common life"¹⁴.

Approaches to BEM: One Example

In 1979, a consultation "inaugurated" by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, which was held at Louisville, Kentucky, at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, brought together representatives of the paedobaptist and believer-

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12. See for example the attempt by Paulos Mar Gregorios "Towards a Basic Document" in *Ecumenical Review* Vol. 41, No. 2 (1989), pp. 184 - 193. Gregorios correctly warns against a "Committee Theology" and writes that "at the moment the ecumenical dialogue has not progressed to the point where a group of theologians can sit down and write an "ecumenical theology" that is vital and coherent." (p. 187). He goes on to say that even though obvious disagreements exist in the ecumenical family, "it is possible to work towards a comprehensive ecumenical theology. This will have to be on the pattern of the Lima document on baptism, eucharist and ministry."
 13. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism op. cit.* pp. 19 - 20. This comment comes in section 19 of the first chapter (on "The Search for Christian Unity"), in a part entitled, "Divisions among Christians and the Re-establishing of Unity".
 14. This statement, coming from a later period, nevertheless captures the reality of the ecumenical dilemma. It comes from the fine study paper, prepared by the Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research, "Baptism and the Unity of the Church: A Study Paper", in Root and Saarinen, eds., *Baptism and the Unity of the Church, op. cit.*, p. 35.

baptist traditions "to reflect on some kind of consensus in the understanding and practice of baptism"¹⁵. This was a sincere and open attempt to set out not only the theological understanding of that which divided various traditions, one from the other, but also to suggest theological and practical guidelines toward overcoming such divisions.

This is indicated by the fact that along with one article entitled "The Authority and Justification for Infant Baptism"¹⁶, there was another entitled "The Authority and Justification for Believers' Baptism"¹⁷. The writer who wrote on infant baptism pleaded that the

15. *Louisville Consultation on Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No. 97 (special issue of *Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 1, Winter 1980) p.3. For an indication of other ecumenical endeavours which dealt with the issue of baptism see Gunther Gassmann, ed., *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963 - 1993*, Faith and Order Paper No. 159 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), p. 23. The document from the 1971 Commission meeting in Louvain, entitled "Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist", is reprinted as Document III. 8 on pp. 104-115. In the section entitled "Believers' and Infant Baptism", it is indicated that "the identity of adult believers' baptism and infant baptism can only be evident if the Churches insist on necessity of the vicarious faith of the congregation as well as of the parents and sponsors. The act of faith also involves the belief that participation in the corporate life of the Body of Christ is an essential element in the salvation of each member and that the baptized infant is initiated into this corporate life. Indiscriminate infant baptism is irresponsible and turns infant baptism into an act which can hardly be understood to be essentially the same as adult believers' baptism." (p. 114).
16. By Joseph F. Eagan, S.J. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-61.
17. By G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Ibid.*, pp. 62 - 70. Beasley - Murray is the author of the elaborate study, *Baptism in the New Testament* [1962] (London: Macmillan, 1963). In this book, the author, a Baptist, concludes the section entitled "The Rise and Significance of Infant Baptism", with the words: "It seems that a small amount of water is bestowed on a small infant with a very small result. And this, it is alleged, is *baptism*! Can it be wondered at that Baptists should be strengthened in their determination to strive for the retention of the fullness of baptism, ordained of the Lord and continued in the Apostolic Communities, and that they should continue to lift up their voices among the Churches to plead for a return to this baptism? It has never been the property of an exclusive group within the Church but the gift of the Risen Lord to the whole Church. It is time his people took it afresh from his gracious hands." (pp. 385 - 386) In order to be fair to Beasley - Murray it must also be noted that in his last page of his postscript on baptismal reform and inter-church relations he emphasises the "inadequate insights of frail individuals and of our very fallible

scandalous division over something as basic and fundamentally simple as Christian initiation must stop; it devastatingly hinders the mission of the Church to evangelize the world according to the Great Commission of Christ; it keeps churches from sharing each other's Christian riches to their mutual great improvement. Paedobaptists must therefore rise above inadequate understandings of original sin and the grace of baptism itself and resolutely refuse to baptize infants whose parents give no reasonable promise of Christian nurture; believer baptists must resolutely resist the temptation to build their Christian identity *exclusively* on the practice and theology of New Testament baptism and to maintain it on a once legitimate but now obsolete critique of sixteenth and seventeenth century Church-State baptismal practices¹⁸.

The writer who wrote on believers' baptism pragmatically suggested that

In a time when Christians are endeavouring to establish full recognition of each other's Churches various solutions appear to be possible. (1) Baptists should recognise the legitimacy of infant baptism where it is followed by profession of faith and acceptance into full church membership. (2) Paedobaptists should recognize the legitimacy of baptism on profession of faith of those baptized in infancy.¹⁹

One of the obvious difficulties with these suggestions is that the fundamental issue as to how the individual churches themselves have

traditions ..." (p. 395). Beasley - Murray is the author of the elaborate study, *Baptism in the New Testament* [1962] (London: Macmillan, 1963). In this book, the author, a Baptist, concludes the section entitled "The Rise and Significance of Infant Baptism", with the words: "It seems that a small amount of water is bestowed on a small infant with a very small result. And this, it is alleged, is *baptism*! Can it be wondered at that Baptists should be strengthened in their determination to strive for the retention of the fullness of baptism, ordained of the Lord and continued in the Apostolic Communities, and that they should continue to lift up their voices among the Churches to plead for a return to this baptism? It has never been the property of an exclusive group within the Church but the gift of the Risen Lord to the whole Church. It is time his people took it afresh from his gracious hands." (pp. 385 - 386). In order to be fair to Beasley - Murray it must also be noted that in his last page of his postscript on baptismal reform and inter-church relations he emphasises the "inadequate insights of frail individuals and of our very fallible traditions ..." (p. 395).

18. Eagan, p. 61.

19. Beasley - Murray, p. 70.

internalized different understandings of baptism as being a part of their existence and self-identity, an existence and identity which has very often been at least partially shaped as a reaction to the teachings propounded by other churches, has not been adequately addressed.

The BEM Document and the Variety of Responses

It was clear to all those involved in the effort leading up to the production and publication of the BEM document that although in one sense it marked the culmination of a difficult journey, it also signalled the beginning of another journey, no less difficult. The document was sent to all member churches, asking them "to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority, whether it be a council, synod, conference, assembly or other body"²⁰. That is to say, it was recognised that the reception of the document would be the ultimate test of its value and worth. The responses were collected in six volumes, which indicate the range and diversity of opinions²¹. It is clear that the process of responding to the BEM document, and the insights that it contains, has not been free of friction and even hostility. The Faith and Order Commission points out that "the critical comments and suggestions for further clarification occupy more space in the responses than the positive affirmations, which are usually expressed, however, in a clear and encouraging manner"²².

In the summary of these responses to the BEM document, in the section on "Baptism of believers and infants", some of the important points raised included

- the question as to the sharp contrast between "infant" and "believer", in the sense that the baptism of an infant within the context of a believing community can also be characterised as "believer's baptism";

- the question regarding the claim made in BEM (IV. A. 11) that in the New Testament what is most clearly attested is "baptism on personal profession of faith";

- the question as to whether the BEM text "has too easily settled for compromise and too easily dismissed a fundamental incompatibility between infant and adult believer's baptism";

20. BEM "Preface", p.x. The Preface also traces the ecumenical journey that led to BEM. Also see Gunter Wagner, "Baptism from Accra to Lima," in Max Thurian, ed., *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 116 (Geneva: WCC 1983), pp. 12 - 32.

21. *Churches Respond to BEM*, ed. Max Thurian, Vols. I-VI (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986 - 1988).

22. *Ibid.*

- the question regarding the baptism of the handicapped, "who lack sufficient intellectual capacity to make a mature profession of faith";

- the question regarding a theological foundation for the "unrepeatability" of baptism, and the practical implications of this for those churches who do not regard the baptism of believing adults, who had been baptised as children, as "re-baptism"²³.

All this indicates that even in the period immediately after the publication of the BEM document there was guarded optimism coupled with a plea not to over-simplify complex issues.

BEM and Beyond

There is an increasing attempt by churches belonging to different confessional families, groupings of those oriented in a particular theological direction, or even by individual churches themselves, to engage in bilateral or multilateral dialogues, where specific issues regarding the doctrines and practices that continue to be both theological and practical irritants, like the practice of Baptism or the existence of mixed marriages are discussed, analysed and debated, and attempts made to produce consensus documents for further study and action²⁴. This does not mean that such conversations and attempts are oriented merely towards the relational praxis of the churches in

23. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982 - 1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, op. cit., pp. 45 - 48.

24. An excellent collection of such documents covering the period 1982 - 1990, has been assembled together and commented upon in *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung: Samtliche Berichte und Konsentexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene* Band II, 1982 - 1990, Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Harding Meyer, Damaskinos Papandreou, Hans Jorg Urban, Lukas Vischer (Paderborn: Bonifatius Druck Buch Verlag / Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 1992). Some of the conversations which have, among other matters, considered the issues raised by Baptism, include the conversations between the Anglicans and the Reformed (pp. 132 - 188); the Baptists and the Lutherans (pp. 189 - 216); the Disciples of Christ and the Reformed (pp. 217 - 230); the Baptists and the Roman Catholics (pp. 374 - 391); the Evangelicals and the Roman Catholics (pp. 392-443). An article by Andre Birmele entitled, "Zur Kompatibilität der internationalen zwischenkirchlichen Dialoge: Eine Problemanzeige", in *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 42. Jahrgang, Heft 3 (1993), pp. 304 - 322, seeks to spell out the implications of such endeavours, including asking pertinent questions regarding the "koordination der Rezeption". The same writer has also written on "Baptism and the Unity of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogues" in Root and Saarinen, eds., *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, op. cit., pp. 104-129.

the contemporary context, without taking into consideration the history of the churches, and their Biblical and Patristic heritage²⁵. The ecumenical movement has taken seriously the meaning of the Apostolic Faith in today's context²⁶, especially as it is related to the ecumenical significance of the creedal formulations of the Church²⁷. All this means that there is a dynamic attempt being made to integrate the varying concerns of the different member churches in the ecumenical movement as it relates to their ongoing life, work, and witness. Gunther Gassmann writes:

The discussion on baptism, eucharist and ministry have been at the centre of the Faith and Order movement and Commission from the very beginning. Differences in the understanding and practice of these three foundational expressions of the life of the church have contributed to the divisions between the churches and are still a barrier to eucharistic communion. Consequently, the search for consensus and convergence on these three issues and the common understanding that mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry is an essential

25. The Sixth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues held in October 1994, in its *Report: International Bilateral Dialogues, 1992- 1994* (Faith and Order Paper No. 168) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), observed that where openness to reception and renewal exists, significant changes in the life and mission of the church occur through, among other things, "contact in theological formation with the broader heritage of the church through the ages....." p.7.
26. See for example Hans-Georg Link, ed., *Apostolic Faith Today: A Handbook for Study*, Faith and Order Paper No. 124 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), where it is pointed out that "this apostolic faith study is profoundly related to the convergence document on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" and its reception process in the churches. Baptism, eucharist and ministry theologically belong to the wider horizon of the apostolic faith and it is the apostolic faith that the churches are being asked to discern and respond to in their responses to "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (p. 272).
27. See *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene - Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* New Revised Version, Faith and Order Paper No. 153 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), where in commenting on the creedal article "One baptism for the forgiveness of sins", it is pointed out that "A substantial *challenge* is made to this confession by the fact that in contrast to the one baptism enunciated in the Creed many Churches, while officially recognizing each other's baptism, still cannot join together in the celebration of baptism. Furthermore, there are churches which do not recognize the baptism administered by other churches, and some of them practise what appears to be re-baptism when people come over to them." (p. 90).

requirement and expression of the visible unity of the church have marked the work of Faith and Order since 1927.²²

As an example from within the ecumenical movement, the Orthodox position on the interrelationship between the Spirit and Baptism can be quoted from an article entitled "Orthodox Reflections on the Assembly Theme", where it is affirmed that

[b]uilding upon basic human values, the Spirit prepares human persons for the reception of the gospel and salvation in Christ through baptism. As the water of baptism is exorcised of evil and becomes a vehicle for the sanctification of creation, so those baptized in the sanctified waters and sealed with the Spirit receive the power of the Spirit to confront evil and the problems facing the world today ...²³

At the seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Canberra in 1991, an attempt was made to describe what unity meant for the churches in today's context. This statement *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*²⁴, among other things, called upon all churches "to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document" The Faith and Order Commission, in taking this call and mandate seriously, pointed out that

[a]mong the most positive elements in the movement towards koinonia is the convergence in our understanding of baptism, and especially the common affirmation of baptism as incorporation into the common life in Christ, in koinonia. (...) In spite of this growing convergence, some questions remain ... As regards baptism, these questions concern not only different understandings of baptism and its sacramental nature, but also

28. In Gassmann, ed., *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963 - 1993*, op. cit., p. 22.

29. In Emilio Castro, comp., *To the Wind of God's Spirit: Reflections on the Canberra Theme* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 98.

30. Found in Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), pp. 172 - 174, and reprinted in the preparatory discussion paper for the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, held at Santiago de Compostela in 1993, *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness: A Discussion Paper* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), pp. 11-13. This statement has been sharply criticized by the former Director of the Faith and Order Commission, Lukas Vischer, in an article entitled "Is This Really 'the Unity We Seek'," in the *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (1992), pp. 467 - 478. Vischer writes, "I cannot regard the Canberra statement as marking any real progress. Indeed, I would even say that in more than one respect it represents a step backwards in comparison to earlier statements on unity." (p. 477)

different conceptions of the relationship of baptism to faith, the action of the Holy Spirit and membership of the Church³¹.

Given this reality of promise and potential on the one hand, and pitfalls and problems, on the other, it is clear that Koinonia, at least with regard to baptism, continues to be an area of debate and dialogue, both within the ecumenical movement and in congregational situations³².

One other point that has to be made is that there are tentative attempts being made to address the issue raised by *baptism in its relationship to conversion*³³. In an article entitled "The Concept of Conversion in the Ecumenical Movement: A Historical and Documentary Survey"³⁴, Ans van der Bent points out that "the time is overdue for the church to examine its doctrine of conversion carefully and to subject its language to the test of both theological and psychological enquiry"³⁵. He refers to the study document prepared for the fourth assembly of the WCC in Uppsala in 1968 by Paul Löffler entitled *Conversion to God and Service to Man*, where Löffler wrote "... conversion and baptism, while linked with the entry into the church, do not serve its interests but the larger purpose of God for the whole creation"³⁶. In concluding his survey, van der Bent makes a soteriological comment:

All Christian traditions do not suffice to proclaim fully salvation to the world. It also implies that the exchange of conversions between Christians and people of other living faiths cannot

31. *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*, Ibid., p. 30.

32. See the comments and analysis offered by Dagny Heller who frankly assesses positions and interrelationships between the Baptists, the Orthodox and the Catholics, among others, and points out that "one may get the impression that the situation today is in fact more complicated than it was before BEM. In any case, it is not as simple as BEM portrays it. But I do not wish to be pessimistic, yet it is necessary to face the difficulties as they are. ... one might argue that the most important thing is to continue with the bilateral dialogues. Nevertheless, to a certain extent the multilateral dialogue is also necessary. In either case, what is needed above all are patience and a profound will to attain unity." In "Baptism - the Basis of Church Unity?" op. cit., p. 489.

33. In the Indian context this issue has been addressed by K.P. Aleaz in his article, "Conversion: Some Indian Christian Reflections", *National Council of Churches Review*, Vol. CXV, No. 1 (January 1995), pp. 28-42.

34. In *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (1992) pp. 380-390. The general theme of this issue is "Conversion".

35. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 384. Also n. 9, p. 390.

render God's love for the whole human race totally transparent. The openings of individual hearts to God, the obedient mission and ministry of the churches and the liberating search for a pluralistic theology of faiths are but adumbrations of the one God who is the author and the completer of all salvation³⁷.

Both Löffler's comment and van der Bent's point tend towards an inclusivistic understanding of salvation. Therefore it would be important to take seriously the comment from Stanley J. Samartha, who asks why words like *mission* and *conversion* evoke dread in countries in Asia and Africa today, and goes on to say

[c]onversion, instead of being a vertical movement toward God, a genuine renewal of life, has become a horizontal movement of groups of people from one community to another, very often backed by economic affluence, organizational strength and technological power. It also seriously disrupts the political life of the country by influencing the voting patterns of people. Why then should Christians be surprised when the very words *mission* and *conversion* provoke so much anxiety, suspicion, and fear?³⁸

Infant and Believers' Baptism: The Example of the Church of North India

The Church of North India, which came into existence as a united church in 1970, as a union of former Anglicans, Baptists, Brethren, Disciples, Methodists (British and Australasian), Presbyterians and Congregationalists, is one of the few denominations in the world which makes space for the practice of either infant or believers' baptism within the one church³⁹. In the constitution under Section V: The Sacraments of the Church, Sub-Section: A. Baptism, Clause 4, we read:

Inasmuch as the Church of North India will have within its membership both persons who practise Infant Baptism in the

37. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

38. In *One Christ - Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991) pp. 148 - 149.

39. See the section on "Baptism", in *The Constitution of the Church of North India and Bye - Laws* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1987), pp. 16 - 19.

The official response of the Church of North India to the BEM document is filled with several pertinent questions calling for deeper and sustained theological reflection. It is interesting that no direct comments are made about infant and believer's baptism. The response is in Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM: Volume II, Faith and Order Paper 132* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986) pp. 69- 73.

sincere belief that this is in harmony with the mind of the Lord, and those whose conviction it is that the Sacrament can only properly be administered to a believer, both Infant Baptism and Believer's Baptism shall be accepted as alternative practices in the Church of North India⁴⁰.

The Constitution goes on to discuss how those baptised in one of these two ways can then become a communicant member.

Here we have an example of how it has been possible, both in theological and practical terms, to uphold the validity of the alternate means of understanding and practising baptism within the wider framework of the unity of the church. What is needed now is a detailed qualitative analysis of how the vision has translated into reality within the CNI.

Lingering Questions Regarding Baptism in India Today

Although this paper has been concerned with tracing the issue regarding infant and believer's baptism within the ecumenical movement, other important points regarding baptism in the Indian context cannot be brushed aside. The important point regarding baptism and its relation to our neighbours of other faiths or of no faith at all, is one such. Stanley J. Samartha, in an article entitled "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths" points out, after an analysis of scriptural citations regarding baptism and the Holy Spirit, that "the possibility of the Spirit being present and active among those who are not baptized, and in communities outside the visible boundaries of the institutional church, should be left open rather than closed"⁴¹. This is a question that continues to provoke impassioned, and sometimes emotional, debate, both at the local level and in wider forums⁴².

One cannot overlook the pointed and provocative remark made by M.M. Thomas in one of his last published articles that "the question of giving to the unbaptised Christ-bhakts in other religious communities, a sense of full belonging to the spiritual fellowship of the church including participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper needs exploraiton"⁴³.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

41. In Emilio Castro, comp., *To the Wind of God's Spirit*, op. cit., p. 56.

42. Paul Knitter, in his *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995) attempts to spell out practical implications of our common *human* responsibility. A noteworthy section is that analysing the implications of holding on to the conviction of Edward Schillebeeckx that "extra mundum nulla salus," pp. 113-117.

43. M.M. Thomas, "The Church - The Fellowship of the Baptised and the

One also needs to examine the question regarding baptism and church membership. With regard to baptism and the church, a pertinent question comes from Leelamma Athyal who asks: "When the church gets more people to join its membership through baptism, it rejoices. But should it? Is it because the Church's membership has increased? Or, because some people have become the disciples of Jesus" ⁴⁴. We need to ask whether after almost two thousand years of existence the church has recognised its orientation in terms of the Kingdom. If we pray, along with the writer of the *Didache*: ".... let your church be gathered from the four corners of the earth into your kingdom" ⁴⁵, then how do we understand the sacrament of baptism in relation to the church and in relation to the kingdom? If the church is understood as "an agent to implement the mission of God" ⁴⁶, then what is the role of those who claim to be members of the church through baptism? If clergy and laity are called upon to remember that they "are in the church not for our own sake but for the mission to which God has called us" ⁴⁷, then does baptism bring with it the mission imperative? If mission is primarily understood in terms of the mission of God, then what is the link between this understanding of mission and the understanding of baptism as an entry into the institution called the church? Joseph Mattam writes:

Baptism understood as the expression and celebration of one's conversion to Christ, of one's acceptance of Christ and his ways, of one's attitudinal changes to form a more inclusive community with the one goal of a fuller humanity is still meaningful. Baptism understood as the celebration of a new vision of society, of a new pattern of relationship with people, God and the cosmos is still desirable: When we welcome people to baptism, in the context of the poor and dalits in India, it is a call to a counter

Unbaptised?" in Prasanna Kumari, ed., *Liberating Witness: Dr. K. Rajaratnam's platinum Birthday Anniversary Commemoration*, Vol. 1 (Madras: Gurukul, 1995), p. 13.

44. Leelamma Athyal, "Church: An Obstacle to God's Mission? A Theological Appraisal of P. Chenchiah's Thoughts on Church and Mission", in Abraham P. Athyal and Dorothy Yoder Nyce, eds., *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns* (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1998), p. 55.
45. *Didache*, 7.9.4b, translated in *Understandings of the Church*, trans. and ed., E. Glenn Hinson (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1986) p. 22.
46. David Udayakumar, "Church-in-Mission: Facing Contemporary Challenges," in Athyal and Nyce, eds, *Mission Today*, p. 24.
47. J. Patmury, "Laity and Mission", in Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim, eds., *Mission Trends Today: Historical and Theological Perspectives FOIM V* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997) p. 150.

culture (not a separate Christian culture) which will empower the poor and will help them change their self-image and transform their world view into a new cooperative pattern. It is in view of this mission that baptism becomes meaningful, not in terms of the salvation of few individuals⁴³.

The sacrament of baptism has, down the ages, been a source of bitter controversy and dispute. As the church in India prepares to enter the new millennium, it is high time that the rich insights, the detailed discussions, the joyful and painful experiences, are all harvested, winnowed and sieved, so that a return to the sources, a reaching back, can truly be the means of moving forward toward and uncertain, yet challenging future, as a church grasped by the vision of unity, in this multi-cultural and multi-religious land of ours.

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Appendix and parts of some footnotes had to be omitted for want of space.

48. Joseph Mattam, "Indian Attempts Towards a Solution to the Problems of Conversion", in Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim, eds., *Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal FOIM IV* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1996), pp. 125 - 126.